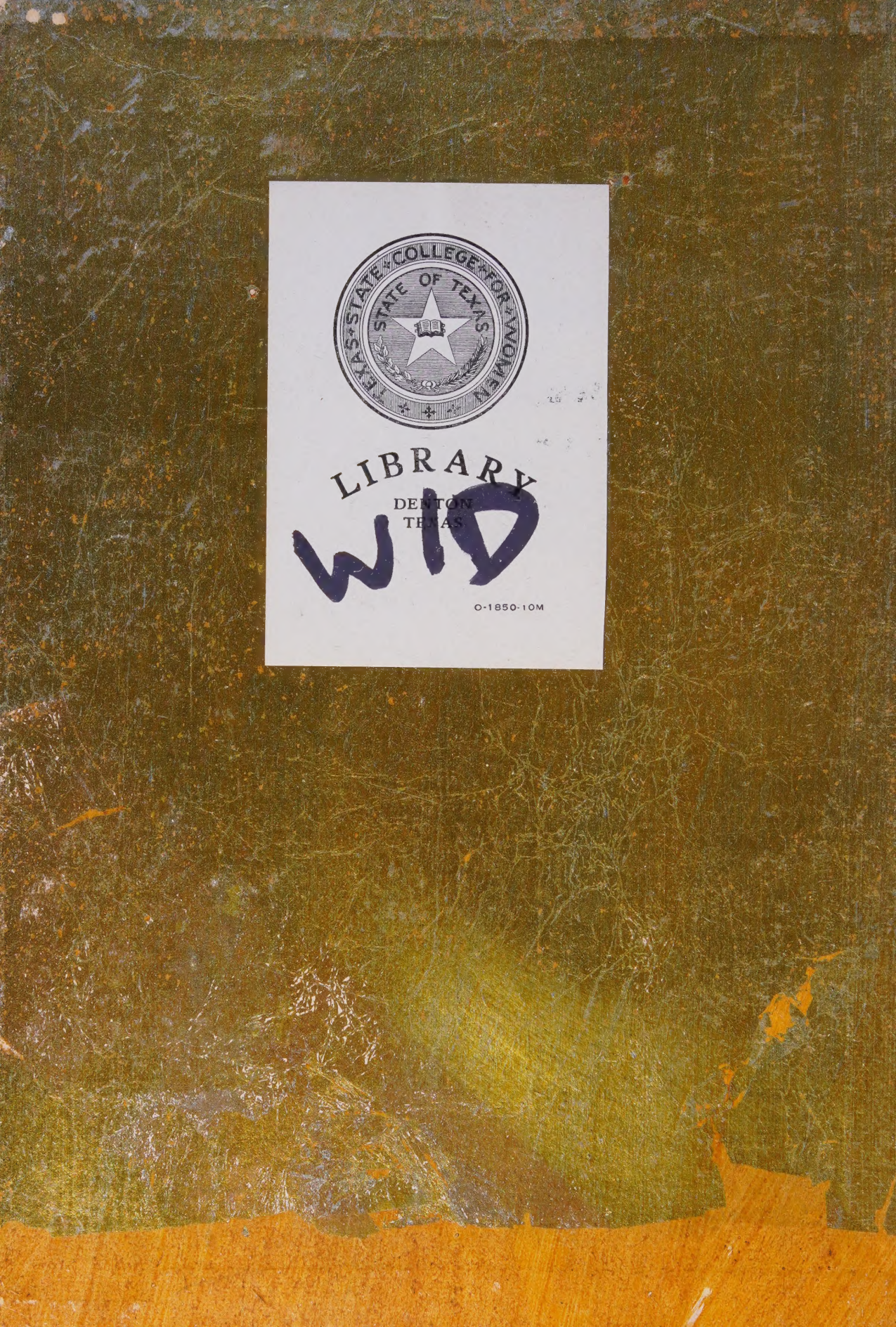
# THE FIRST ENGLISH ACTRESSES




LIBRARY
DENTON
TEXAS
WID
O-1850-10M

DATE DUE

DEC 1 5 2007

JAN 0 9 2007

JAN 0 2 2008

DEC 14 2009

Demco, Inc. 38-293

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2022 with funding from
Kahle/Austin Foundation

https://archive.org/details/firstenglishactr0000unse

# THE FIRST ENGLISH ACTRESSES

S. Harding Del. Pub. Aug.1.1794. by F.& S. Harding Pall Mall. Schroeder Sculp.

Mrs Hughes.

From a Picture in Sir R. Peel's Library.

*The Players' Series*

# THE FIRST ENGLISH ACTRESSES

FROM THE

## *Initial Appearance of Women on the Stage*

IN 1660 TILL 1700

*BY*

HENRY WYSHAM LANIER

*Illustrated from Contemporary Prints*

NEW YORK
THE PLAYERS
1930

COPYRIGHT, 1930, BY HENRY WYSHAM LANIER

*Printed in the United States of America*

792.92
L287f

# *PREFATORY NOTE*

*Since I cannot find that any writer hitherto has made a book on this pleasant subject of the first actresses in English—the references to the advent of women on our stage being confined to a few chance pages and notes in miscellanies of the period and modern studies of the drama—it seems appropriate that The Players' Series, of monographs on theatrical personalities, should start with some attempt to focus the information available.*

*In compiling this little volume I have drawn freely on the expert knowledge of Mr. Roy Day, librarian of the Players' Collections.*

*Thanks are due also to Mrs. Lillian Arvilla Hall, Custodian of the Theatre Collection of the Harvard College Library; and to Mr. W. J. Lawrence for guidance on some matters in which he has long specialized.*

*The chief volumes from which facts have been secured are noticed in the short bibliography at the end of the book.*

*H.W.L.*

# *CONTENTS*


| CHAPTER | | PAGE |
|---|---|---|
| I. | One Charm Unknown To The Good Old Times | 13 |
| II. | In Greece And Rome | 15 |
| III. | Do Men Make As Attractive Women As Women? | 22 |
| IV. | D'Avenant's Innovating "Siege of Rhodes" | 32 |
| V. | That Elusive First Actress | 39 |
| VI. | The Actress Accompanies Charles II To The Throne | 49 |
| VII. | Some Ladies Who Accepted Facts | 59 |
| VIII. | What Mary Saunderson Did For The Profession | 71 |
| IX. | The Fascinating Mrs. Bracegirdle | 75 |
| X. | When Bracegirdle Met Oldfield | 85 |
| XI. | Conclusion | 93 |
| XII. | A Table Of 17th Century Actresses | 96 |
| | Bibliography | 103 |

# *ILLUSTRATIONS*


Margaret Hughes
*Engraved by S. Harding from a drawing by Schencker. E. and S. Harding Pall Mall,* 1792 . . . . . Frontispiece

FACING PAGE

Inside of the Duke's Theatre, Lincoln's Inn Fields
*From an engraving of a drawing by Richard Sawyer in the extra-illustrated "Story of Nell Gwyn"* . . . . . 16

The Duke's Theatre, Dorset Garden
*From an engraving in Elkanah Settle's "Empress of Morocco." (Extra-illustrated "Story of Nell Gwyn")* . . . . . 20

The Duke's Theatre, in Dorset Gardens. The River Front
*From the engraving by R. Page,* 1825 . . . . . 26

Joe Haines, the Comedian, Rides on the Stage
*After a contemporary print* . . . . . 30

Mary Davis
*From the painting by Sir Peter Lely in the National Gallery* . . . . . 38

Strolling Players of the Early Days
*Engraved by G. Presbury from the original by Hogarth* . . . . . 42

Nell Gwyn
*From the engraving of a portrait by Henri Gascar, about* 1675 . . . . . 46

Mrs. Ellen Gwinn
*Engraved by P. V. B.* 1751 *from a portrait by Sir Peter Lely* . . . . . 50
*"The sculptors part is done the features hitt*
*of Madam Gwin no Arte can showe her Witt."*

Nell Gwyn as Cupid
*From the portrait by Lely which was No.* 306 *in King James' Collection, "concealed by a sliding panel"* . . . . . 58

## ILLUSTRATIONS [*continued*]

FACING PAGE

A Letter from Nell Gwyn
*Courtesy of Harvard College Library, Theatre Collection* . . . . . 62

Eleanor Gwyn
*Engraved by V. Green from a painting by Lely in the Duke of Buckingham's collection* . . . . . 66

A Very Rare Program of 1669 at the Theatre Royal
*Dryden's Secret Love, or The Maiden Queen, with Ann Marshall, Nell Gwyn and Mrs. Knipp in the cast.* (*see Pepys' Diary, March 2, 1667*) . . . . . 74

Scene from Secret Love, or The Maiden Queen
*The Queen* (*Ann Marshall*) *compares her charms with those of Candiope* (*Mrs. Quin*) *before her confidant, Asteria* (*Mrs. Knipp*) *and the man she loves, Philocles* (*Major Mohun*).
*Engraved by Gravelot from a drawing by G. Van der Gucht* . . . . . 78

Elizabeth Barry
*Engraved by Knight after the portrait by Sir Godfrey Kneller, in the collection of the Earl of Oxford* . . . . . 82

Mrs. Bracegirdle
*Engraved by James Stow from a drawing by S. Harding* . . . . . 86

Ann Bracegirdle as The Indian Queen
*From a mezzotint by E. Cooper* . . . . . 90

Anne Oldfield
*With signature.*
*From the portrait by Jonathan Richardson at the National Gallery* . . . 94

Title Page
*Drawn by Gordon Ross, embodying Edwin Booth's book-plate, with the Booth coat-of-arms.*

# THE FIRST ENGLISH ACTRESSES

CHAPTER
I

# *ONE CHARM UNKNOWN TO THE GOOD OLD TIMES*

THOSE of us who knew the awakening eighties and "gay nineties" are apt to find ourselves somewhat out of tune with the broadcast paean of modern Progress. The far distant past begins to seem alluring enough amid the raucous squawk of radio imbecilities, the reverberating talkies that insult ears and intelligence.

We are sure things were better forty years ago when we were boys; doubtless they were better still four hundred years back.

Of course, we do make all due allowance for the glamour which is the priceless possession of youth—in time as well as human personalities; and, using our own experience as a guide to those earlier centuries, we freely admit that many of the harsher and smellier realities must have dropped out of the historic picture, leaving it mellowness and romance in quite untrue proportion.

Still, we are firmly convinced that in many matters we moderns have paid for universal plumbing and incessant, noisy mass-entertainment at the price of most of the charm of life.

Yet in one of the major charms of life the most conservative will have to award the later centuries precedence over the early seventeenth and its fore-runners.

That is, in considering the Ladies of the Stage.

Let us glance for a few moments at the revolution, taking place so

quietly fifty years after Shakespeare's time, which makes the above comparison not to be disputed.

For the ladies of the English stage up to the Restoration of Charles II were men!

As with most epochal ameliorations of life, from the discovery of fire to the steamboat, the origin of this novelty of real women on the stage is somewhat clouded. Possibly a Chinese scholar would blandly inform us that when our ancestors were still exhibiting their naked skins in tasteful patterns of blue woad, the aged Celestial Empire had thoroughly tested this realistic experiment—and, discarding it, had returned to its own traditional, highly stylized convention, which has in our time produced Mei Lang-Fang as a finished and subtle interpreter of feminine emotion.

At least though, a barbarian Westerner can only note that no trace has come down to us of real women players, even on the Oriental stage, earlier than the seventeenth century—except in one development of that Roman theatre which so strikingly suggests some of the characteristics of our own time.

CHAPTER

II

# *IN GREECE AND ROME*

THE scholars seem to agree that on the Greek stage, though there may have been women dancers, both in the Tragedies and Satyric dramas, the women's parts were always performed by male actors in masks.

Oddly enough, one of the twenty-four ancient colored mosaics let into the pavement of the octagonal room in the Pio-Clementine Museum at Rome [the "Salon of the Muses"] — which are among our most important pictorial documents in these matters, clearly shows the Tragic Muse as a woman, her mask pushed back on top of her head, one foot raised on a stone to show more clearly the thick wooden sole of the cothurnus which added height and dignity to the performer.

But the whole background testifies the other way. The Greek Chorus was developed from religious ritual and preserved much of its primitive military formation; and in early days women had small part in either of those matters. Sparta came nearest to recognizing their existence officially in such functions, in the races between young girls which were there a feature of the Bacchic festival — and Greek drama began with the Dithyramb to Bacchus, the Paean to Apollo, and the Dionysian Hymn.

Rome, as was inevitable, put its own character stamp on the classical Greek drama which it took over, via Etruria, with its physical and mental lordship of the civilized world. It was at first a harsh imprint

upon a beautiful and perfected art; in the eye of an arrogant Roman citizen, the actor [except those well-born orators declaiming the Atellane Fables] was an "infamous" person, not required or permitted to perform the primary civic duty of military service, excluded from the roster of the tribes. Women might be slaves or prostitutes, but they could not be allowed to offend public decorum by sinking so low as to tread the boards.

The Mimes [pantomimes] changed all that, as Rome developed to Big Business, with the incessant craving for new sensations created by money's brute power in raw human nature.

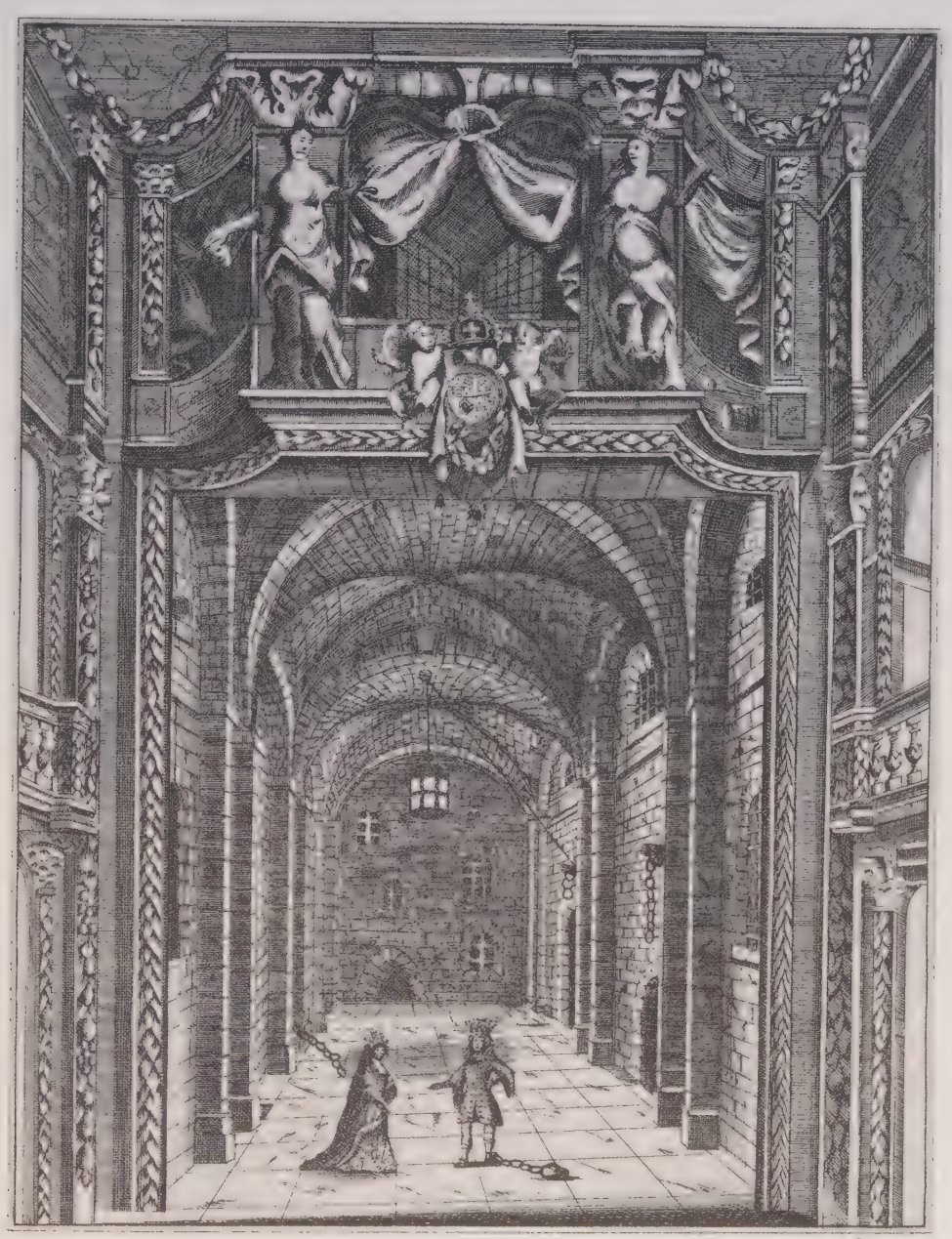
Elaborate spectacles, buffoonery, suggestive dances and obscene jokes presently had as powerful an appeal to the rich Roman as the latest Broadway hot show has had for that "big butter-and-egg man from the Middle West" who has been the scapegoat for something inherent in our own civilization [and doubtless in every other where Things have become unduly important].

The successful actor had long had wealth showered on him. Clodius Aesopus, the great tragedian, left a fortune of about a million dollars when he died, toward 50 B.C.; and it seems that the most valuable Roman slaves were those who could be taught to act; such a literate human chattel, Arbuthnot solemnly computes, was worth to his master "Eight hundred and seven pounds, five shillings and tenpence."

As always, the developing theatrical entertainments quite accurately expressed the changing character and ideals of the people.

The moral "Mr. Dibdin," in the course of his "comprehensive survey" of the Theatre of all countries and all times, was "beyond measure" astonished at what is recorded of this swift degeneration from Greek elevation and dignity when the Roman mob, and the Roman plutocrat, demanded realism, pantomime, action and vaudeville—and got them:

"To such a pitch was this carried, that the common people, who



INSIDE OF THE DUKES THEATRE
in Lincoln's Inn Fields.
*as it appeared in the reign of King Charles II.*

relished nothing but grossness and buffoonery, in the midst of the regular performances were continually calling for athletic feats, tumbling and bear dancing. One of the comedies of Terence is said to have been thus interrupted several times during the two first representations, and the performers were obliged to quit the theatre, to make place for rope-dancers and gladiators; for had this not been complied with, a further representation of the comedy would never have been permitted."

With such a public the great Spectacle "with a punch" was bound to be a winner.

When Pompeius made a smashing hit by putting on *Clytaemnestra* with Agamemnon returning with 600 real, laden mules ["600! Count them. 600!"]; and when a highbrow millionaire poet like Lucan [nephew of the great Seneca, and son of a fabulously wealthy procurator general] was employed to write the book for one of these ballets [*fabulae salticae*], it would have been impossible that some shrewd impresario should not have seen the chance for a knock-out by presenting beautiful girls for the audience's delectation.

So the real ladies followed the real mules upon the boards, or vice versa.

Again Mr. Dibdin, in the correct early nineteenth century, frowns at the horrid details:

"The satires, or farces, of the Greeks were little pieces admitting of either tragic or comic subjects treated as burlesque. Those of the Romans were poems mingled with bitter invectives against vice. The objection against both is that they were impure and indecent to a monstrous degree; for while the Greeks, to relieve their tragedies, than which nothing can be more chaste and pure, introduced mobs of drunken satyrs, whence the title of these pieces, the Romans exposed, without mincing the matter, by lascivious and obscene descriptions and attitudes, those vices they affected to hold up to public scorn.

"Nay, we are told, by way of a very curious remedy against vice, which to a degree horrid and complicate no people ever encouraged so much as the Romans, that actresses were exposed naked, after the piece was over, to do away any impression the Roman youths might have received from those charms which had been veiled from their sight."

As might be expected, even despite these drastic precautions against the subtleties of imagination, there were results at once affecting the social structure as well as the art of the theatre. Even into the calm and dignified halls of the lawgivers there penetrated the agitations of this impact. As early as Constantine's time it became necessary to enact a law sternly forbidding Roman Senators to marry women of the stage. And just how effective this must have been may be gathered from that incredible but true history of Theodora in the sixth century.

This amazing lady began her career as the daughter of a man who earned his living as a "bear-feeder to the Green Faction" in the amphitheatre at Constantinople.

These "factions" were originally the backers of particular contestants in the chariot races, who took their champions' colors. At first these were but two, white and red; then two more, blue and light green, were added; and in Constantinople the whole public was violently divided between blue and green partisans. They were earnest to an extent which makes the pop-bottle-throwing baseball fans of the United States seem mild enough: under Anastasius, in 501, the Greens, who had concealed daggers and stones in their baskets of flowers as they entered the Hippodrome, attacked their Blue enemies—and killed three thousand of them right there in the theatre! Of course, both politics and religion had become mixed up with the factions; but they started with that fierceness of the spectator, watching other people perform feats so much that he finally needs some such strange physical outlet for his aroused emotions. Gibbon, in his fortieth chapter, reproduces an extraordinary

scene in the amphitheatre when the Emperor [Justinian] and the Green faction slanged each other like quarrelsome slaves, the monarch calling them angrily, "Jews, Samaritans and Manichaeans."

This bear-feeder, a Cypriote named Acacias, became Master of the Bears, and presently died, leaving a wife and three girls, Theodora the youngest, being only six or seven. His widow had a successor all picked out, for both jobs; and when she failed in this canny provision for the future, she sent the three children into the amphitheatre to plead for a chance to earn their living, and hers, on the stage—whereupon the Greens received them with contempt, but the Blues showed sympathy. Comito, the eldest, got her opportunity, and Theodora followed her, "in the dress of a slave, with a stool on her head."

Soon the little girl began to take part in the pantomimes, skits, dances, and buffoonings so dear to the heart of those masses. She could not dance, nor sing, nor play the flute; but as a pantomimic buffoon she was an instant hit: "as often as the comedienne swelled her cheeks, and complained with a ridiculous tone and gesture of the blows that were inflicted, the whole theatre of Constantinople resounded with laughter and applause."

In that land of early maturity it was but a very few years before she showed that beside her pantomimic gift she had a pulsing equipment of the appeal of sex, a true heritage from her ancestral Isle of Venus. Small and elegant, with fair complexion and delicate coloring, she was beautiful of face and had a matchless figure; and she showed at once an impudent wit, and that sheer vital energy which has always captivated both satiated and crude audiences.

She pleased the Public. The modern young woman aspirant who longs for a Broadway hit, because it means immediate independence and luxury, may be outraged to learn that this made her of value, not to herself, or even to the bear-feeder's widow, but to the Hippodrome:

she and her beautiful sisters could not even hire themselves out—they were something like "white slaves," chattels of the management, and the Hippodrome leased them to any rich roysterer or promoter who would pay for such professional entertainers.

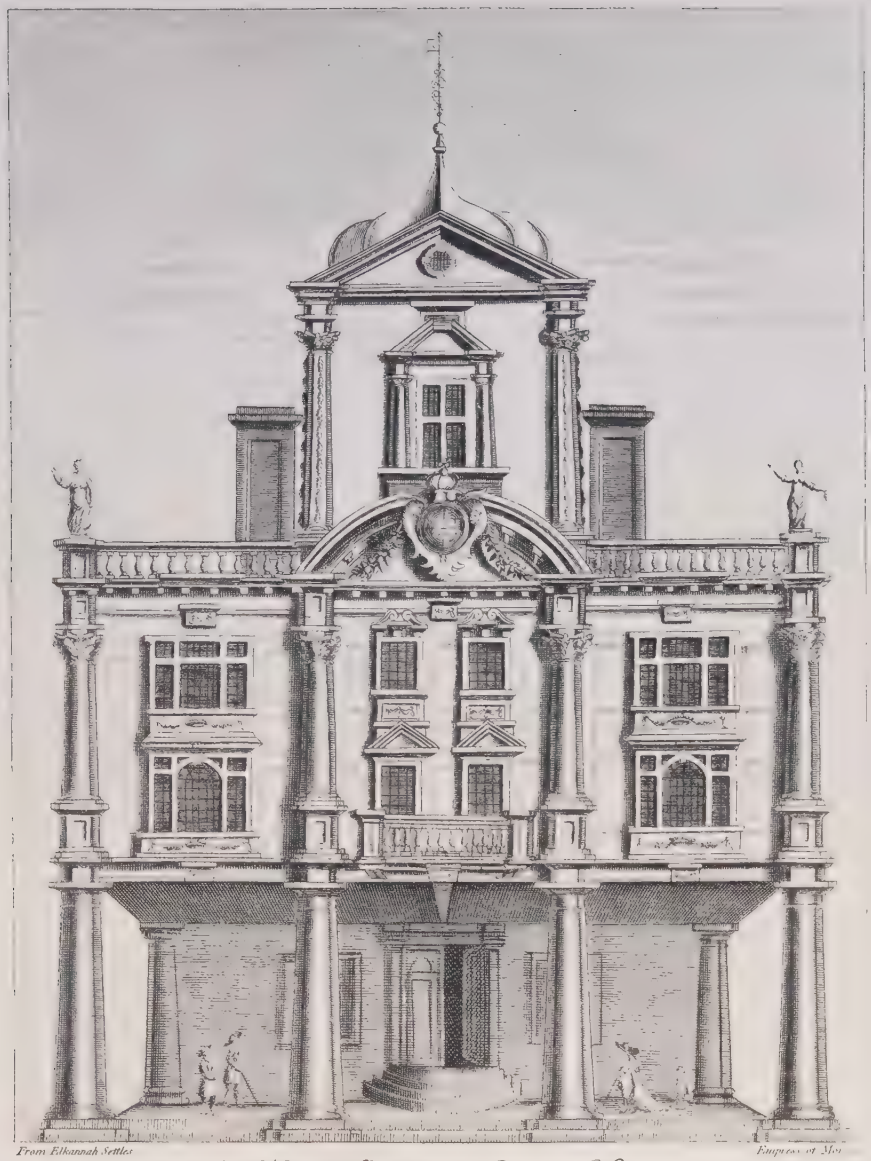
That hardly retarded her rise. Before long the successor to her father was still feeding raw meat to the bears—but little Theodora was catering quite as raw and more profitable fare to the Byzantine mob.

She became something like a youthful queen of burlesque, and something else: "the fortunate lover who had been promised a night of enjoyment was often driven from her bed by a stronger or more wealthy favorite". Ecebolos took her with him when he went as Governor to the African Five Cities—and presently cast her off. She went through the dregs of Alexandria, and finally, "in her laborious return to Constantinople every city of the East admired and enjoyed the fair Cyprian."

Arrived at home again, she acted a new part, took a quiet little house, spun wool, affected a life of chastity—seeking to achieve her horoscope. And lo! the self-denying, controlled, abstemious young patrician, Justinian, nephew of the Emperor as he was, fell desperately in love with her, notwithstanding her status as notorious mimad and courtesan. That made a lively scandal at Court, especially with the female gorgons guarding the aristocratic portals.

Presently Justinian's frowning aunt died; and with this most powerful opposition removed, he actually got the existing statute repealed, and married Theodora. In a few years the bear-warden's impudent brat, the despised mimad, was flaunting it as the beautiful Empress Theodora, wife of Justinian the law-giver, greatest of the emperors of the eastern Roman realm; ruling her husband who ruled the civilized world—and incidentally ruling the lives of her courtiers as something of a demon chaperon and imperial matchmaker.

Modern British aristocracy, or the dollar aristocracy of the West,



From Elkannah Settles

Amphitheatra *sile, et Spectacula Barbara Cæsar:*
*Non coeunt Nudi, non Aper, Ursa, Leo.*
*Nos Mites colimus Musas, lenivit* Amor
Prælia: *cum nostro est Incola* Marte Venus.
*Quos fœrunt olim Thalamo cepisse Theatro*
*Ludentes una cernat Apollo Deos.*

THE DUKE'S THEATRE,
Dorset Garden.

has invented nothing new along these lines. The beautiful spirited woman, whatever her origin, has always "crashed the gate" of social caste — and then usually become an alert gate-keeper.

And in those days, and for centuries afterwards, a main function of the stage, as far as women players were concerned, was to give a girl a more effective medium for displaying her personal wares than "coming out" into society, or being presented at Court, furnishes to her better-placed sisters.

CHAPTER

III

# *DO MEN MAKE AS ATTRACTIVE WOMEN AS WOMEN*

WHATEVER there was of stage drama in the European world for the next thousand years, the actress had little part in it.

Certainly in England, though the theatre and its folk had for some centuries won a sort of scornful toleration under lordly patronage, the idea of women on the stage was grotesque and shocking as late as 1629.

It was no novelty in France,* and the Islanders who had made the Continental tour were aware of these un-English foreign customs. In *The Ball*, by Shirley and Chapman, 1639, the pretended traveller, Jack Freshwater, says that in Paris "the women are the best actors, they play their own parts, a thing much desired in England by some ladies, inns-o'-court gentlemen and others." Italy, too, had had women performers for some time; and Barretti, writing later, about 1761, in his "Familiar Letters" insists that till within twenty years of that time *all* the parts in Spanish plays were acted by women!

*Mr. W. J. Lawrence says: "The first French actress seems to have been a certain Marie Fairet, who in 1545 was a member of a strolling company of players headed by one L'Esponnière. But the curious point is that while the French preceded the English in their employment of actresses by over a hundred years, women dancers were seen on the English [i. e. Restoration] stage about a quarter of a century before they were seen in France. If I mistake not, the first female ballet dancers to appear on the French stage were seen in opera in 1690, before which time the female roles in ballet were taken there by masked males."

But England in 1629 stood staunch for unsullied Womanhood. At Michaelmas of that year a French company came to London, hoping for the patronage of their royal countrywoman Queen Henrietta Maria — and doubtless not unmindful of a certain taste shown by King Charles for the finer products of la belle France. Though, as noted, women actors had for some decades been accepted in that country and Italy, their social position was certainly something like that of the Roman mimes; and the scandal was great in Anglo-Saxondom when this affront to womanliness was announced.

Nevertheless Sir Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels, did not hesitate to license them; his Register for November 4 of that year notes: "For the allowing of the French Company [with women actors] to play a farce at Black-friars, £2" [he was a censor whose fees were his own perquisite].

It helps to a picture of this 17th century stage — which it was feared women would degrade — especially after reading the intimate memoirs, the scurrilous poetry, and the labored indecencies, to note how vigilant was this worthy autocrat in censoring profanity on the stage [and, of course, any subversive reference to the fall of Kings through their own misdeeds]. In 1623 he records: "A Tragedy of the Plantation of Virginia: the profaneness to be left out, otherwise not tolerated." He allowed "an old play called Winter's Tale" on "Mr. Hemmings his word that there was nothing profane added or reformed," and did not charge his usual reading fee since the book was not submitted. *The Whore*, and *The Way to Content All Women*, and *All's Lost by Lust*, *The Nightwalker* and *The Duke's Mistress*, were inoffensive and fit to pay their legal fees — though it must be said that Lord Rochester's most extreme offering, *Sodom; or, the Quintessence of Debauchery*, had to be performed in private, at that intimate royal Cockpit theatre in Whitehall [entirely different of course, from the famous Cockpit in Drury-Lane] to which Pepys was

lucky enough to gain admittance through a chance meeting with a noble acquaintance who was entering. But Charles himself sat in earnest consultation with the Master over D'Avenant's *The Wits* in 1634; and this marvellous pair of guardians of innocent ears excised all blasphemy from the manuscript, but allowed "faith, death, slight for asseveration and no oaths, to which I do humbly submit as my Master's judgment, but under favour conceive them to be oaths."

And this was the well-born brother of an Ambassador and brother of that rare poetic spirit, George Herbert. It is not strange that later, at the Restoration, we find D'Avenant in a fierce battle with him, challenging his arbitrary power and his onerous fees of £2 for each new play and £1 for each performance—with a reading fee even when the play was forbidden, as in the case of a Massinger tragedy referring to the deposition of Sebastian of Portugal by Philip of Spain: "I had my fee notwithstanding which belongs to me for reading it over, and ought to be brought always with the book."

Court and official ideas of what was proper on the stage differed widely from those of the stringent sectarians who were to seize power in a few years.

Itchy moralists had long been fulminating against the drama in any shape or form, as concealing the cloven hoof. As early as 1577 [when one William Shakespeare was a boy of thirteen, perhaps killing calves for his father and "doing it in a high style and making a speech"] John Northbrooke emitted a monitory "Treatise wherein Dicing, Dauncing, Vaine Playes or Enterluds &c are Reproved."

Two years later there was a sterner blast from a Kentish scholar of Oxford, later a vicar. Stephen Gosson was then of the mature age of twenty-three, but already a reformed playwright, author of pastorals and at least three plays: *Catiline's Conspiracies*, a comedy called *Captain Mario*, and a "moral play," *Praise at Parting*. His diatribe, clearly

betraying his own inner struggles with some of the "lewd" impulses he castigates so bitterly, was titled, "The Schoole of Abuse, conteining a pleasaunt Invective against Poets, Pipers, Players, Jesters &c.;" and one passage in which he flagellates his own brain children illustrates his mixed emotions.

After pointing out many historical instances of unrighteousness connected with the theatre, he is constrained to admit that "as some of the players are farre from abuse, so some of their playes are without rebuke" —though these are so few as to be quickly reckoned.

He then names four or five which have a moral lesson and are void of "amorous gesture wounding the eye," among them—

"*The Black Smith's Daughter* and [his own] *Catiline's Conspiracies* usually brought in at the Theatre: the first containing the Trechery of Turkes, the honourable bountye of a noble mind, the shining of vertue in distresse. The last because it is knowen to be a pig of mine own Sowe, I will speak the lesse of it; onely giving you to understand that the whole marke which I shot at in that woorke, was to showe the rewarde of traytors in Catiline, and the necessary government of learned men in the person of Cicero, which foresees every danger that is likely to happen, and forstalles it continually ere it take effect. Therefore I give these plays the commendation that Maximum Tyrius gave to Homer's works . . .

"These playes are good playes and sweete playes, and of all playes the best playes, and most to be liked, woorthy to be soung of the Muses, or set out with the cunning of Roscius himself, yet are they not fit for every mans dyet: neither ought they commonly to be showen.

"Now if any man aske me why my selfe have penned commedyes in time past, and inveigh so egerly against them here, let him know that *Semel insanavimus omnes:* I have sinn'd and am sorry for my fault: he runnes farre that never turnes: better late than never."

Fifty years later stout Prynne had the advantage of having no peccadilloes of his own to confess. "Histrio-mastix" was the cry of a stern Hebrew prophet, calling down fire on Sodom and Gomorrah: all kings and emperors who had favored plays had died violently, all women appearing even in Court masques [the Queen herself by implication] were daughters of Jezebel. This was a bit strong for the Cavalier stomach in 1633, and the over-zealous Puritan became crop-eared in distressing fact, for the Star Chamber treated the author a little more savagely than he had proposed to treat actors and playgoers. But when Cromwell's Ironsides took charge of the government, his book became holy writ for alert reformers.

Among his horrible examples he cites the French ladies of four years before:

"They now have their female players in Italy, and other foreign parts—and in Michaelmas 1629 they had French women-actors in a play personated at Black-friars, to which there was great resort."

There was "great resort" —for the first performance; but earnest Churchman Thomas Brand, as anxious a guardian of public morality as Puritan Prynne himself, adds an important detail: he reports grimly to Archbishop Laud that these "unwomanish and graceless" ones were properly treated by an aroused audience for their daring. These "women, or monsters rather," made their poor little effort to entertain with their farce, but "Glad am I to say they were hissed, hooted and pippin-pelted from the stage, so that I do not think they will soon be ready to try the same again."

Some lines in a play by Richard Brome, suggesting a much earlier date for the appearance of the first regular actresses than the accepted one, were obviously a satirical allusion to this misadventure, just like the topical hits of a contemporary vaudeville performer or musical revue singer.

Engraved by T. Pye

*The Duke's Theatre in Dorset Gardens.*

In Brome's *The Court Beggar*, produced in 1632, "at the Cock-pit by his Majestie's Servants," Lady Strangelove the "humerous widow, that loved to be courted," says railingly:

"To your business, Gentlemen, if you have a short speech or two, the boy's a pretty Actor; and his mother can play her part; women-Actors now grow in request."

There is no evidence that this was anything but a rather cruel jest: for all the horrified pictures of existing "abuses" drawn by root-and-branch reformers, the fact was that everyday British Morality could still not stomach the impropriety of real women on the stage.

To be sure, there had been many appearances of women in various kinds of public entertainments. Professor T. S. Graves* some years ago made a most interesting collection of such instances of female performers.

It seems probable that in England as in France women occasionally took part in religious plays—as when at Chester *The Assumption of the Virgin* was brought forth by "the worshipfull wyves of the town."

In the New Year's Eve mummings, in the St. George ridings, and as Maid Marians in the May Day games and morris dances, there are numerous references to feminine participation; in fact, the kind of females who portrayed Maid Marian gave the name a most unsavory meaning. And girls had often, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, spoken the prologues and otherwise helped in pageants and masques before royalty.

Then there were freaks that would have stirred Mr. Barnum to instant acquisitiveness: "I have seene a Catamountaine once," says one in *Captain Underwit*, "but all was nothing to the wench that turnd round and thred needles." And in *The City Match*, Plotwell is about to exhibit his "strange fish:"

*[Thornton Shirley Graves] "Women of the Pre-Restoration Stage" in Studies in Philology, Vol. XXII, No. 2, April 1925, University of North Carolina Press.

*"Roseclap shall have a patent of him. The birds*
*Brought from Peru, the hairy wench, the camel*
*The elephant, dromedaries, or Windsor Castle,*
*The woman with dead flesh, or she that washes*
*Threads needles, writes, dresses her children, plays*
*O' th' virginals with her feet, would never draw*
*People like this."*

And the Hog-faced woman," and the woman without hands exhibiting "divers workes, etc., done with her feete," were well-known diversions.

Also there were occasional vaudeville specialties, as when "The Roaring Girle," notorious Moll Frith, sat on the Fortune stage in 1605 "in mans apparel and played upon her lute and sange a song"—a mere attempt to capitalize a town sensation.

Women acrobats, jugglers and rope-dancers, too, had long been accepted. Thomas Norton in 1574 raged against the "shamelesse and unnaturall tumbling of the Italian Women;" and an Elizabethan licence permitted John de Rue and Jeronimo Galt "to sett forth & shewe rare feats of activity w$^{th}$ dancinge on the Rope pformed by a woman & also a Baboone that can doe strange feats."

The connotation has significance: the main attraction of all these early feminine performers, or spectacles, was that they were something against nature, appealing to primitive morbidity.

When it came to permitting women to express ideas on the stage, and play such parts as the male dramatists furnished, this clearly outraged something in the seventeenth century Briton's notion of what was proper.

But when the debonair second Charles came back with his sophisticated French court customers, on top of a somewhat stiff eleven-year dose of ruthless unbridled morality, there was a strangely altered public sentiment.

Amusingly enough, the change was helped even by some of those who wanted to destroy the very memory of the stage, as a sink of iniquity. For the anxious seeker after moral menaces rarely fails to find them, this ravening appetite being one of those that "grows by what it feeds on;" and the zealots hinted darkly at the demoralization following on the practice of men's donning women's garments and pretending to be women. A Dr. Reynolds had publicly frothed at the mouth over this traditional practice, declaring these applauded boys aped feminine airs also off the stage.

Even the unpleasant sight of women performing was less atrocious than that, declared these exponents of forcible feeding of righteousness.

From the point of view of the dramatist or director, there were much more valid reasons of stage art.

There would be a most interesting analysis, which is still to be written,* showing the influence on the dramatist's portrayal of feminine character which must have been exercised by the boy personalities who were to represent these women on the stage.

Take Shakespeare's matchless company of girls and women — from black-browed Rosaline in *Love's Labour's Lost*, and Katherine the Shrew, and poetical Juliet and her Nurse, and Portia and shrewd Jessica, through those rollicking Merry Wives and charming Rosalind, and the bitterly drawn Cressida and Desdemona and Lady Macbeth and Lear's elder daughters, down to Cymbeline and lovely Miranda of the magic isle: obviously these mirror in a large way the changing phases of the man William Shakespeare's own development. But any craftsman of the drama would know beyond a peradventure that some features of these ladies' characters must have sprung directly from the picture in the playwright's mind, as he thought and wrote, of the particular boy-actor

*I only hope the distinguished actor-manager who told me he had long thought of this may work out his striking idea.

who was to "create" that living part to men's eyes and ears. And one can be sure that such a writer must many a time have sweated blood over the stark absurdity of rendering these feminine graces and subtleties, which were so living to him, through the medium of a harum-scarum he-urchin or a battered veteran. For there is more than a hint in such testimony in Cleopatra's speech, where she visions to Iras how the "quick comedians extemporally will stage us"—

> *And I shall see*
> *Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness*
> *I' the posture of a whore."* [*Antony and Cleopatra, V, II,* 218]

There had been a long line of boys and young men who were famous for impersonating female parts, culminating in Robinson, Hart, Clun, Burt, Nokes, and that handsome Kynaston of whom Pepys wrote in January, 1661, [when his days of this sort of role were already numbered]:

"Tom and I, and my wife, to the theatre, and there saw 'The Silent Woman.' Among other things here, Kynaston, the boy, had the good turn to appear in three shapes. First as a poor woman, in ordinary clothes, to please Morose; then, in fine clothes, as a gallant—and in them was clearly the prettiest woman in the whole house; and lastly as a man—and then likewise did appear the handsomest man in the house."

Six months earlier he had noted that Kynaston acted the Duke's sister, Olympia, in *The Loyal Subject*, and "made the loveliest lady that I ever saw my life"—and Samuel surely devoted enough time and laboratory work to investigating that subject to be accepted as a connoisseur of lovely ladies.

But such was not always the result of this inflexible necessity of metamorphosing female characters. Often it was hard to create any illusion of reality with the human material available.

JOE HAINES, *The Comedian*
*Rides on the Stage*
[AFTER A CONTEMPORARY PRINT]

Malone quotes from "a very scarce miscellany," a document of prime importance in tracking down the "first" actress. This is the prologue to a version of *Othello*, acted as *The Moore of Venice* by the Red Bull Company at the new theatre in Vere Street, Clare-Market December 8, 1660—written by Thomas Gordon "to introduce the first woman that come to act on the stage;" and the official apologist for this shattering of precedent there puts the case:

> *"Our women are defective, and so siz'd,*
> *You'd think they were some of the guard disguis'd,*
> *For, to speak truth men act, that are between*
> *Forty and fifty, wenches of fifteen;*
> *With bones so large, and nerve so incompliant,*
> *When you call Desdemona, enter Giant."*

It is needless to multiply instances. The slightest imaginative consideration of the problem will show that the awakening stage sorely needed a change in this essential factor.

CHAPTER

IV

# *D'AVENANT'S INNOVATING "SIEGE OF RHODES"*

THE ludicrousness of some of this casting was obvious enough to intelligent men of the theatre, among them Sir William D'Avenant, who with the wane of the Commonwealth was re-beginning his broken dramatic career, after having been poet laureate, theatre manager and court favorite under the first Charles.

How definitely interrupted such a career had been for more than a decade is evident from a single Act of Parliament under waxing Puritan domination in 1647: this provided that all Stage Galleries, seats and boxes should be pulled down now by warrant of two Justices of the Peace; that all Actors of Plays for the time to come, being convicted [of acting!] shall be publicly whipped; and all spectators of plays for every offence shall pay five shillings. Fantastic Prynne in his "Histriomastix" had asked little more.

Under this and other acts many were imprisoned, punished, fined; and a few furtive bootleg performances had constituted the history of the English stage during this period.

Though at one period D'Avenant was so hopeless for his future that he had all plans made to go to America, he had influential friends, even in an England gone topsy-turvy. In 1656, two years before Cromwell's death signalled a turn of the wheel, he obtained permission to open what was really a sort of theatre at Rutland House in Charterhouse

Yard; this obnoxious word was carefully avoided for fear of arousing the unco'guid and their shrill outcries against "Devil's Chapels;" the first "play" was called "The Entertainment by Musick and Declamations after the Manner of the Ancients," and is generally known as *First Day's Entertainment at Rutland House*—a queer mélange, with Diogenes and Aristophanes arguing for and against Opera, ridicule of the French, gross flattery of Cromwell "the Victor;" and to avert the lingering suspicions of the authorities he insisted on the designation of "operas" for his entertainments.

These were versified plays, dialogue cut short, delivered in recitative, with enough musical accompaniment to warrant the apprehensive description of "musical entertainments," and employing such catchy innovations as elaborately painted scenery and novel stage mechanisms; and the first Part of his bombastic *Siege of Rhodes* was thus performed, with Mrs. Edward Coleman as Ianthe and "another lady" as Roxolana,—probably in September.

The producer needed various kinds of stagecraft to get even this far—for one of his entertainments was sanctioned by Cromwell mainly because its matter cleverly chimed in with one of the Protector's pet hatreds, it being "Entitled the Cruelty of the Spaniards in Peru, expressed by vocal and instrumental music and by *art of perspective in scenes;*" and within a month of the Protector's death a good Presbyterian lady was writing her brother: "It is thought the Opera will speedily go down; the godly party are so much discontented with it."

Edmund Gosse in the "Brittanica" accepts this 1656 performance of *The Siege of Rhodes* as the first instance of the new order of Woman coming into her own on the stage. And it clearly was a public performance for money, for in the Prologue the impresario-author [as superior and "nonchalant" as the gentlemen in the cigarette advertisements] thus refers to the base dross brought in:

*"We have your Money, true; if you can call*
*That ours of which we make no use at all.*
*The Poets never mind such toys as these —[shows money in his hand]*
*But keep them to be sent for when you please.*
*At worst [if you may credit, in frail times,*
*Bankers who turn and wind a world of Rimes]*
*They are but bow'd [borrowed], laid in a trunk above,*
*And kept as simple Tokens of your love."*

[Just to show our modern advancement, or something, one might compare with that the contemporary tale of George Bernard Shaw, bargaining stubbornly with a movie magnate over the picture rights to the Shaw plays, and finally observing: "The trouble is, Mr. Lasky, you think of nothing but Art, while I think of nothing but Money"].

But while the production meets these first professional conditions, the players were amateurs: Captain Henry Cocke, Henry Lawes and Matthew Locke were well-known musicians; Henry Purcell was the father of the famous composer; and Mrs. Coleman herself was certainly not a professional at that time. Moreover, the words were not spoken, but chanted in what Aubrey terms *stilo recitativo*.

So there is good ground for rejecting this as a truly professional appearance.

It was, however, a notable innovation, not only because women did take part, but for other reasons as well.

Though as a play *The Siege of Rhodes* was a strained, overstuffed hifalutin' drama, this timid effort was one of the most interesting productions in the technical history of our stage. For it broke new ground in several fields.

[1] It had the first real scenery in the modern sense exhibited on the English stage. [Though Court masques had long been elaborately mounted.]

D'Avenant's apology for the shortcomings in this pioneering effort is entertaining:

"It has been often wisht that our Scenes [we having oblig'd ourselves to the variety of five changes, according to the Ancient Dramatic distinctions made for time] had not been confin'd to eleven feet in height, and about fifteen in depth, including the places of passage reserv'd for the Musick. This is so narrow an allowance for the fleet of Solyman the Magnificent, his army, the Island of Rhodes, and the varieties attending the Siege of the City, that I fear you will think we invite you to such a contracted trifle as that of the Caesars carv'd upon a nut . . .

"We conceive it will not be unacceptable to you if we recompense the narrowness of the Room, by entertaining in it so much as could be conveniently accomplisht by Art and Industry; which will not be doubted in the Scenes, by those who can judge of that kind of illustration, and know the excellency of Mr. John Web who design'd and order'd it."

[2] It was the beginning of opera in England.

Doni's account is generally accepted, that Western opera started, in the last years of the 16th century, in the experiments at emotional musical expression made by a group of amateurs who met at the house of the Bardi in Florence; Jacopo Peri's *Euridice* in 1600 followed as the first public experiment in this new art; and Monteverde startled the world with several moving operas in the next twenty years.

But English musicians and dramatists had paid little attention; and one of their few real operas of the 17th century was to be written thirty years later by the son of this Henry Purcell who acted in the premiere of *The Siege of Rhodes:* he was not born till two years after this date, and his fine *Dido and Aeneas* was first produced between 1688 and 1690.

The great Dryden [speaking as a poet-dramatist, though hardly as a musician] asserts roundly, "That Sir William D'Avenant's *Siege of Rhodes* was the first opera we had in England, no man can deny; and is

indeed a perfect opera, there being this difference only between an opera and a tragedy, that the one is a story sung with proper action, the other spoken. And he must be a very ignorant player, who knows not there is a musical cadence in speaking; and that a man may well speak out of tune as sing out of tune."

[3] It marked, as stated, the cautious revival of the theatre after the rigorous Puritan suppression.

Even when he ventured to omit the music, drop the tedious recitative style, restore the butchered dialogue, use professional players, and produce regular tragedies, D'Avenant clung to the word opera, both as a drawing-card and as a lightning-rod protecting against the wrath from above.

[4] It did introduce the first English actress who ever "chaunted" on the stage.

Mrs. Coleman was the wife of the Edward Coleman who appeared as Alphonso in this historic performance; he was a celebrated teacher of viol, lute and singing, of great renown as singer and composer. When he died in 1669, his creditors took all his goods for debts, "his wife Catherine consenting."

The lady, however much of an amateur she may have been in this epoch-making production, was practically a professional singer later, though, as far as the stage was concerned, she seems not to have taken a regular part in the movement she had helped to inaugurate. She became later on a recognized public figure, and our invaluable Pepys relates, October 31, 1665:

"About nine at night I came home, and anon comes Mrs. Coleman and her husband, and she sung very finely, though her voice is decayed as to strength, but mighty sweet, though soft, and a pleasant jolly woman, and in mighty good humor . . .

"But for singing, among other things we got Mrs. Coleman to sing

part of the Opera, though she would not own she did get any of it without book in order to the stage; but above all for her counterfeiting of Captain Cocke's part [Solyman] in his reproaching his man with cowardice—'Base Slave,' etc. She do it most excellently."

Beyond a question, Mrs. Edward Coleman has her own niche in the history of this revolution in dramatic art. Unfortunately no one has yet succeeded in discovering a portrait of her, though the general acceptance of her experiment must have prepared the way for those pioneer professionals who were presently to contest the spotlight with the male stars.

The Restoration changed many things in English life, but nothing more radically than the stage. Court and nobility were polished men of the world, smiling cynically at the barbarous prejudices of the stay-at-home islanders, and a wave of Continental sophistication brought in an era of freedom, not to say licence—which was not always poetic.

But however extreme the swing back of the pendulum may have been, at least the dramatic artist had an unhampered chance for a while; and one of the first results was the calm sweeping away of this stupid hoary tradition of men's representing women.

One can smile at the sweeping statement of some solemn chroniclers that such a change was forced upon producers because all the youngsters who had been so successful as "female actors" had grown up to coarse manhood during the Roundhead interregnum, and there was no fresh crop who had developed amid the traditions. Disraeli, for example, explains it all: "the boys who had been trained to act female characters before the Restoration had grown too masculine during the suspension of the theatre to resume their office."

Undoubtedly there were such specific cases; but it was men's minds rather than boys' bodies that had changed.

The main impelling reason was that with freedom to use their artistic

consciousness, to do the thing the way they felt it ought to be, without inhibitions, the stage craftsmen realized the whole custom was an absurdity, destroying the illusion, often ruining their most elevated effects.

MARY DAVIS

[FROM THE PAINTING BY RICHARDSON IN THE NATIONAL GALLERY]

CHAPTER

V

# *THAT ELUSIVE "FIRST" ACTRESS*

THE careful modern scholar, insisting upon proven exactness in dates and casts and texts, is almost in despair when he attacks these first efforts of Restoration drama. That wave of energy was devoted to doing things instead of recording or analyzing them. The exact happenings are often hopelessly hazy and confused: for instance, as regards D'Avenant's company—one of the two which did practically all the producing—we know almost nothing of its activities from its organization in November, 1660, until late in June 1661, except from the few casual gossipy references in Pepys' diary.

And apparently no contemporary sensed enough of the prodigious significance of the change to set down for posterity the indisputable facts which would establish priority for the "first professional actress."

In fact, this little book grew out of the following experience.

While planning a monograph on a recent actress, almost hesitating to ask because I felt it was something any informed person but myself must know, I inquired of a librarian who has a prodigious special knowledge of theatrical matters: "Who *was* the first actress on the English stage, anyhow?" "Why, Mary Saunderson," he replied, "afterwards Mrs. Betterton." On beginning to look up details, however, I discovered that Gosse in the Britannica, following Joseph Knight, claimed the distinction for Mrs. Coleman. And upon trying the able custodian of

one of the greatest libraries of the stage, the answer came unequivocally, "Ann Marshall." That, of course, affects a curious mind as a soft spot under his instrument affects a dentist; and a good many laborious hours went into research in all available sources.

Just to round up some of the diverging trails: John Davies, in his "Dramatic Miscellanies," 1785, following Curll's note on Henry Norris [born 1665] states flatly: "The first woman actress was the mother of Norris, commonly called Jubilee Dicky"—because he had made such a sensational hit in Farquhar's *Constant Couple, or A Trip to the Jubilee* [Drury Lane, 1699] as Dicky that he "lost his own name of Henry and was frequently called in the playbills Jubilee Dicky." He gives no authority.

Dr. Doran says she was certainly of Killegrew's company and Ann Marshall and Margaret Hughes have "been suggested." Percy Fitzgerald plumps for Ann Marshall, another for Miss Saunderson; Robert W. Lowe declares: "Who the first actress after the Restoration was is as yet unsettled."

Here are the ascertainable facts.

Cromwell died September 3, 1658. A premature royalist demonstration of August 1659, was put down — and Charles, eagerly awaiting the issue on the coast of Brittany, retired to Brussels. Incalculable Monk in Scotland, still generalissimo of the parliament forces, crossed the Tweed for parts south on January 2, 1660, reaching London a month later. In April Charles proclaimed from Breda a general amnesty. May 8th he was proclaimed King of Great Britain and Ireland at Westminster Hall. Three weeks later, on his thirtieth birthday, he passed "through a lane of happy faces," of rapturously loyal subjects who jammed the streets of London; doubtless he wondered "how long this had been going on."

In the midst of his tense anxieties he had time to take thought for the languishing state of his devoted subjects of the buskin.

A patent, licensing him to produce theatrical entertainments, was issued to D'Avenant a week after the Proclamation. This alert entrepreneur had engaged Betterton and the company which had furtively struggled along under Rhodes—a bookseller and former wardrobe-keeper at the Black-friars, who had gotten to work at his favorite activity while sphinx-like General Monk was on the march from Scotland to London, holding in his tight-shut hands the destinies of the land—not to mention those of the English stage.

Included in this group were Kynaston, the boy who outwomaned women, James Nokes, and four others who commonly played woman's parts: Angel, William Betterton, Mosely and Floyd. The stock specialties of the two last [almost as regular features of Restoration plays as prologue and epilogue] were, according to old Downes, "to Act the Part of a Bawd and a Whore."

Since no artist of course had any right to exist except as an appendage to a prince, this company became the Duke of York's Servants.

Probably at the same time a patent was granted to Thomas Killegrew, who gathered a company of the surving old actors under the protection of the monarch himself: these, His Majesty's Comedians, were styled "Gentlemen of the Great Chamber," and among their perquisites was each ten yards of Scarlet Cloth from the Royal Household Establishment, with a proper quantity of lace for liveries.

There was also an unorganized group, a "scattered Remnant of several of these [pre-war] Houses, which began acting at the Red Bull," partially open to the weather in the spring and summer of that eventful year; some of these veterans had taken part in the various unlicensed attempts to give plays in that period of suspense while city and nation and possible monarch waited for Monk's arrival. Both D'Avenant and Killegrew were earnestly striving to suppress that inveterate poacher, the irrepressible Jolly, and his light-hearted enterprises. And Sir Henry

Herbert was moving heaven and earth, and quoting precedents "beyond which the memory of living man runneth not," to prove that even the King's Majesty could not sanction the two Patentees by taking away his own comfortable job as Master of the Revels in this once-more-revelling England—and actually forcing the said Majesty to rescind his formal action, to the extent of restoring to Sir Henry his former power of high, low and middle justice over the speeches put into the mouths of the player folk by the dramatists.

But these two managers, after a period of court intriguing and sundry alterations and adjustments, became the accredited official purveyors of stage entertainment—naturally alert to protect their little monopoly.

D'Avenant's patent [and evidently Killegrew's also] from "Charles the Second, by the Grace of God, King of England, Scotland, France and Ireland, Defender of the Faith, &c.," as revised January 15, 1662, from the earlier versions of May and August, 1660, contained this clause:

"And forasmuch as many plays, formerly acted, do contain several prophane, obscene and scurrilous passages; and the womens parts therein have been acted by men in the habits of women, at which some have taken offence; for the preventing of these abuses for the future, we do hereby straitly charge and command and enjoyn, that from henceforth no new play shall be acted by either of the said companies, containing any offense to piety and good manners, nor any old or revived play, containing any such offensive passages as aforesaid, until the same shall be corrected and purged, by the said masters or governours of the said respective companies, from all such scandalous and offensive passages, as aforesaid.

"And we do likewise permit and give leave that all the womens parts to be acted in either of the two said companies for the time to come,

may be performed by women, so long as these recreations, which, by reason of the abuses aforesaid, were scandalous and offensive, may by such reformation be esteemed not only harmless delights, but useful and instructive representations of humane life, to such of our good subjects as shall resort to see the same."

That document must be considered a sort of Magna Charta or Act of Enfranchisement of the women of the stage; and I am surprised that an engrossed, illuminated facsimile does not hang over the fireplace of the Twelfth Night Club in New York City.

The women pioneers of D'Avenant's company were: Mrs. Davenport, Mrs. Saunderson [afterwards Mrs. Betterton], Mrs. Davis, Mrs. Long, Mrs. Gibbs, Mrs. Norris, Mrs. Holden, Mrs. Jennings; and the first four, being his "principal" actresses, were "boarded in his own house."

This item of the ladies' housing had distinct significance as to the status of these women players; and this becomes quite clear upon examination of the contract made by D'Avenant, November 5, 1660, with "Thomas Batterton" and eight other named actors of the Cockpit company, and "Henry Harris of the City of London, painter."

This agreement formed a sort of stock company "publiquely to act all manner of Tragedies, Comedies, and playes whatsoever;" the women had no share: they were to be "provided" by the manager.

The total receipts, after deducting "generall expence," were to be divided into fifteen "shares or proporcions;" two went to D'Avenant for house-rent, building, scaffoldings, frames for scenes, etc.; one more for costumes and properties; a further seven were his "to mainteine all the Women that are to perform or represent Womens partes . . . And in consideration of erectinge and establishinge them to bee a Companie, and his the said Sir William's paines and expences to that purpose for many yeares." The other five shares were to be divided among the signing men players *and* Henry Harris the scene-painter, who had a share

equal to the largest in this division. The male actors had to furnish their own costumes; and they were required to post a bond of £5,000 for the faithful performance of their part of the undertaking.

It really looks as if at the start these first actresses of the English stage were in much the same position as little Theodora and her sisters of the Constantinople Hippodrome — chattels of the management. What D'Avenant's arrangement with them was is not known; certainly, some decades later the salaries paid even to leading actresses were absurdly disproportionate to their drawing power.

Killegrew's opening list of female stars showed: Mrs. Corey, Mrs. Ann Marshall, Mrs. Eastland, Mrs. Weaver, Mrs. Uphill, Mrs. Knep [Pepys' admiration and good comrade] the beautiful Mrs. Hughes, Mrs. Rebecca Marshall and Mrs. Rutter.

[It must be remembered that the English actress of this early period, whether married or not, unlike the French, was commonly chronicled as "Mrs." The two Marshall ladies in this list, for instance, were the young unmarried daughters of a clergyman. "Miss" had acquired quite another significance. Sedate John Evelyn notes in 1661 that Roxolana had been taken away "to be the Earl of Oxford's Miss, as at this time they began to call lewd women]."

Evidently Killegrew got ahead of his rival D'Avenant in actually showing the new attractions. He was gentleman of the bedchamber, and a recognized purveyor of, sometimes highly questionable, entertainment to His Majesty; the actual work of his productions was largely left to his company: he was close to the King and that was an asset indeed.

His enterprise at once became the Theatre Royal. At first located in a former tennis-court in Vere Street, and presently in a new building in Drury Lane, it was from the start assured of fashionable audiences.

It was this company which on December 8, 1660 [according to the ms. of Master Sir Henry Herbert] produced that version of Othello,

called *The Moore of Venice*, the prologue to which has been referred to, and in which Mrs. Hughes, or Ann Marshall, or some innovating lady, acted the part of Desdemona.

There had been in June a performance at the Red Bull, by the Old Actors, of a comedy, *The Tamer Tamed* [Fletcher's *The Woman's Prize*] wherein an epilogue was "Spoken by the Tamer, a Woman;" but there is no evidence for the supposition that a woman took the part; indeed in October these Red Bull players, in petitioning the King, mention that they have now covenanted with Killegrew to act under his management "along with woemen."

Then there was certainly a revival of *Othello* by Rhode's company as early as October 11, when Pepys notes that "the very pretty lady" who sat beside him "called out, to see Desdemona smothered;" but had the stage Desdemona been a real woman, he would surely have celebrated the novelty as he did later.

All of which helps to confirm the record of December 8 as the date of this history-making event. And Spencer has lately found* a letter just a week after the performance, from Andrew Newport to Sir Richard Leveson, in which the former remarks, "upon our stages we have women-actors, as beyond sea."

Professor Spencer considers the Desdemona was "almost certainly" Margaret Hughes, who took the part in a cast of this same company, given by Downes, a couple of years later: in this Burt was Othello; Mohun, Iago; Hart, Cassio: Mrs. Hughes, Desdemona; Mrs. Rutter, Emilia.

The text used was probably unaltered from that in the Players Quarto, *Othello* being one of the few plays which the "improvers" of those times spared; and it was the second Shakespearian play produced by the licensed companies, *Pericles* having been previously given by the Duke's Players.

*Hist. MMS. Com., 5-158; as noted in Spencer's "Shakespeare Improved."

John Payne Collier, [of whom a scholarly biographer remarks, "No statement of his can be accepted without verification, and no manuscript he handled without careful examination, but he did much useful work"] maintained that he had solved the priority puzzle, between Ann Marshall and Mrs. Hughes, while librarian to the Duke of Devonshire "by some wretched doggrel, containing a yet more wretched pun, which I detected upon a loose piece of paper among Manuscripts both of older and more recent date preserved at Bridgewater House.

"Hence we learn that Ann Marshall, already named as a member of Killegrew's Company, played Desdemona before she relinquished the part to Mrs. Hughes, to whom it is assigned by Downes . . . The lines run thus—

*"Who must not be partial*
*To pretty Nan Marshall?*
*Though I think, be it known,*
*She too much does de-moan;*
*But that in the Moor*
*May be right, to be sure*
*Since her part and her name*
*Do tell her the same.*
*But none can refuse*
*To say Mistress Hughes*
*Her rival outdoes."*

Line 4, he says, in the old manner was written "She to much *do's-de-moane*, playing on the name Desdemona, and censuring Miss Marshall's too lachrymose delivery. Others may have been of the same opinion, and hence she might be induced to relinquish Desdemona in favor of Mrs. Hughes."

Interesting this, if authentic, [and W. J. Lawrence, after examing the Harvard MS., pronounces it "an impertinent forgery"] but even then needing much to give it any finality as testimony. It would merely

Madame Ellen Groinn and her troo sons, Charles
Earl of Beaufort and James LORD Beauclaire

show there was rivalry between the two leading ladies in this part — which we might guess beforehand.

No one has been able to identify this epoch-making actress more exactly; Lawrence declares that after studying the problem for twenty years he considers the point indeterminable; as it is — until some lucky delver finds the exact cast of that historic performance of *The Moore*. There is not even a portrait extant of the Marshall; Margaret Hughes, reaching contemporary fame in another way, was worth picturing as the "Miss" of a Prince of the Blood. But a mere couple of decades after the attempted appearance of women caused a riot and the stoppage of the show, few considered the matter important enough for comment.

Kynaston was still impersonating women with vast acclaim, certainly as late as January 7, 1661; but it was not long before he and Hart and Burt and Clun and Angel and Nokes were to find that particular occupation gone, and be forced to turn to other roles according to their several talents.

Our gossip at need, Pepys, marks the revolution fairly sharply. On November 20, 1660, he saw Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Beggar's Bush* performed all by men. The succeeding third of January he saw Killegrew's players do the same comedy, "it being very well done, and here the first time that ever I saw women come upon the stage."

Little to-do as the public made over this disappearance of the petticoated youth from the boards, the directors and stage managers must have had strong ideas on the subject.

Colley Cibber relates how the King [Charles II] "coming before his usual time to a tragedy, became impatient that the play did not at once begin. Whereupon the stage manager, rightly judging that the best excuse for their default would be the true one, fairly told his Majesty that the queen was not *shaved* yet.

"The King, whose good humour loved to laugh at a jest as well as

make one, accepted the excuse, which served to divert him till the male queen could be effeminated.

"In a word Kynaston at that time was so beautiful a youth that the ladies of quality prided themselves on taking him with them in their coaches to Hyde Park, in his theatrical habit, after the play; which, in those days, they might have sufficient time to do, because the plays then were us'd to begin at four o'clock."

This strong personal appeal preserved a place for Kynaston, in his famous impersonations, for quite a while after the boy-woman was a mere tradition; and James Nokes, another lesser favorite, took the part of an old woman in *Banditti* quarter of a century later [1686].

Some months after this initial performance, whose heroine we have attempted to trace, D'Avenant got into action, presenting the second part of his cumbersome and spectacular *Siege of Rhodes*—with Mrs. Davenport as Roxolana and Mrs. Saunderson as Ianthe.

The lovely Davenport and the skilful actress made a huge success.

From that time on, the new fashion was accepted as something too natural to question.

Perhaps though, it was five years later that one must consider the official stamp of royal approval was placed upon women players [unless that had been given by Old Rowley's habit of taking for himself any who specially pleased him]. On June 30, 1666, a warrant was issued to nine members of the Royal company as "Weomen Comoedians in his Ma$^{ties}$ Theatre Royall." These honored ones were Mrs. Weaver, Mrs. Marshall, Mrs. Rutter, Mrs. Yates, Mrs. Nepp, Mrs. Dalton, Ellen Gwyn, Eliz. Hall, ffransis Davenport, and Anna Child; and they were authorized to receive "foure yards of bastard scarlet cloth and one quarter of a yard of velvett for their liveryes."

CHAPTER

VI

# *THE ACTRESS ACCOMPANIES CHARLES II TO THE THRONE*

AS MIGHT be expected with a rakehelly joker like Killegrew, whose favor with the King depended mainly on his ability to keep his master from being bored, some audacious experiments were made.

Such was his own brutally bawdy comedy, *The Parson's Wedding*, full of sophisticated hits for the initiated at Court figures, at the stodgy cits, at the Puritans, at women, at virtue—which was produced at the monarch's own Cockpit by an entire company of women, hoydenish Ann Marshall probably speaking both prologue and epilogue in men's clothes, as she did at the Theatre Royal in 1672. But that is leaving the art of the theatre for something quite different; and the reason for insisting on details here is just that these two matters were inextricably intermixed in the early Restoration theatre—as could easily be forecast with a stage controlled by such a court.

Allardyce Nicholl* presents an illuminating picture of this influence of the arrogant upper class upon the theatre and its folk:

"The theatre was their toy: they could do with it what they liked. They could appropriate a certain portion of the playhouse, that apparently between the front curtain and the outer edge of the stage, and stand there, conversing more or less 'wittily, picking their teeth' and

*A History of Restoration Drama, 1660-1700. Cambridge University Press, 1923.

'oft combing their Hair.' This was no doubt between the acts, for peculiarly enough when we think of Elizabethan example, no very great body of spectators, if any at all, would appear to have occupied seats on the stage itself until a comparatively late date in the century. In 1664 Sorbières particularly observed that this vice was not in practice then, and it is not till about 1690 that we find many references to the custom. In 1674 it was apparently unknown, for Vincent saw fit to omit all references to gallants on the stage when he was re-writing Dekker's *Gul's Horn-Book*. On the other hand, in 1691, one of the characters in D'Urfey's *The Marriage Hater Match'd* [D.L. 1692] declares of a lord: 'I have seen him spoil many a Comedy, by baulking the Actors entrance, for when I have eagerly expected some buffoon to divert, the first nauseous appearance has been my Lord.' In the same year Settle, if he be the author, issued an imploring prologue to The Fairy Queen [D.G. 1692] against those

*new* Beau-Skreens
*That stand betwixt the Audience and the Scenes*,

while in 1693 Thomas Wright in his *The Female Virtuoso's* [D.G. 1693] emphasized the fact that *once* the stage had been '*kept free from* Beaux *and* Bullies.' The edict of William and Mary, stating expressly that no person should either stand or *sit* upon the stage, evidently had no effect, the habit persisting on to the time of Garrick.

"In this theatre, the toy of the upper classes, gentlemen apparently could enter without payment for a single act, or could rely on credit if they had not sufficient money to pay the door-keeper. Of the latter custom there is ample proof in the playhouse scene in Shadwell's *A True Widow* [D.G. 1679]. Even as early as Dec. 30, 1667, Pepys thought it a shame that Sir Philip Carteret was known at the theatre 'and do run upon the score for plays,' and as late as 1693 F.P. in some verses prefixed to Higden's *The Wary Widdow* [D.L. 1693] could mention gallants

P. Lely Eques Pinxt.

P. V. B. Fe 1751.

# Mrs Ellen Gwynn.

who at the 'Playhouse judge *on tick*.' The free act was regularly satirized by the poets, and attempts were made to put an end to it, but apparently not till about 1690 was it in any way limited. D'Avenant murmured against the fashion in the epilogue to *The Man's the Master* [L.I.F. 1668] and with perfect justice, if we may take Pepys as a typical spectator. On Jan. 7, 1667/8, for example, the latter 'to the . . . two playhouses, in the pit, to gaze up and down, and there did by this means, for nothing, see an act in "The Schoole of Compliments" at the Duke York's House, and "Henry the Fourth" at the King's House.' Even as late as 1693 Wright in his prologue to *The Female Virtuoso's* [D.G. 1693] had some satire on the 'one-acters,' and Farquhar in his *Essay on Comedy* [1700] has satiric reference to the 'saucy impudent fellows . . . called Door-Keepers, that can't let a Gentleman see a Play in Peace, without jogging and nudging at him every minute. *Sir, will you please to pay? . . . Sir, the Act's done, will you please to pay, Sir?*' On the other hand, gentlemen who objected to disbursing their money to the ordinary doorkeeper were often-times not unwilling to pay more than the simple half-crown in order to have access to the 'tyring-room' where they might chat with the actresses. Whether a fixed charge was made for this or not, we know that some sort of payment was made. In spite of the fact that the actresses may not have been averse to this easy entrance to the tyring-room — the affability of a woman there was proverbial — it is almost certain that the managers of the theatres were careful to gain some profit by it."

That, of course, comes so close to erecting a house of assignation in the playhouse that it is not surprising the noble clients behaved like visitors to such establishments. One can imagine what such a professional life was to a woman with any self-respect — and there were such, in spite of the conditions and the cold-blooded assiduity of the gallants.

Cibber, again, leaves us a pretty glimpse of such aristocratic manners:

"I shall now give you another Anecdote, quite the reverse of what I have instanc'd wherein you will see an Actress as hardly us'd for an Act of Modesty [which without being a Prude, a Woman, even upon the Stage, may sometimes think it necessary not to throw off]. This too I am forc'd to premise, that the Truth of what I am going to tell you may not be sneer'd at before it be known. About the year 1717, a young Actress of desirable Person, sitting in an upper Box at the Opera, a military Gentleman thought this a proper Opportunity to secure a little Conversation with her, the Particulars of which are probably no more worth repeating than it seems the *Damoiselle* then thought them worth listening to; for notwithstanding the fine Things he said to her, she rather chose to give the music the Preference of her Attention: This Indifference was so offensive to his high Heart, that he began to change the Tender into the Terrible, and, in short, proceeded at last to treat her in a Style too grossly insulting for the meanest Female Ear to endure unresented: Upon which, being beaten too far out of her Discretion, she turn'd hastily upon him with an angry Look, and a Reply which seem'd to set his Merit in so low a Regard, that he thought himself oblig'd in Honour to take his time to resent it: This was the full Extent of her Crime, which his Glory delay'd no longer to punish than till the next Time she was to appear on the Stage: There, in one of her best Parts, wherein she drew a favourable Regard and Approbation from the Audience, he, dispensing with the Respect which some People think due to a polite Assembly, began to interrupt her Performance with such loud and various Notes of Mockery, as other young Men of Honour in the same Place have sometimes made themselves undauntedly merry with: Thus, deaf to all Murmurs and Entreaties of those about him, he pursued his Point, even to throwing near her such Trash as no Person can be suppos'd to carry about with him unless to use on so particular an Occasion.

"A Gentleman then behind the Scenes, being shock'd at his unmanly Behaviour, was warm enough to say, That no Man but a Fool or a Bully cou'd be capable of insulting an Audience or a Woman in so monstrous a manner. The former valiant Gentleman, to whose Ear the Words were soon brought by his Spies, whom he had plac'd behind the Scenes to observe how the Action was taken there, came immediately from the Pit in a Heat, and demanded to know of the Author of those Words if he was the Person that spoke them? to which he calmly reply'd, That though he had never seen him before, yet, since he seem'd so earnest to be satisfy'd, he would do him the favour to own, That indeed the Words were his, and that they would be the last Words he would chuse to deny, whoever they might fall upon. To conclude, their Dispute was ended next Morning in *Hyde-Park*, where the determined Combatant who first ask'd for Satisfaction was oblig'd afterwards to ask his Life too; but his Antagonist in a few Years died in one of the principal Posts of the Government."

[This champion of insulted Beauty, by the way, according to "The Laureat," was the later Mr. Secretary Craggs, secretary of war, a secretary of state, involved with his father in the South Sea Bubble, and a warm friend of Pope, Addison and Gay. The bully was Captain Montague. And the young actress was Miss Santlow. She afterwards married Barton Booth, one of the foremost actors of the time in Shakespearian roles — and Edwin Booth, though he had never traced the connection, was convinced Barton was one of his line. He wrote Mrs. Richard F. Carey, September 16, 1864: "In answer to a question in Emma's letter about Barton Booth, I do not know, but I suspect, from the fact that his 'arms' [over his grave in Westminster Abbey] being the same as my father's family, that he was an ancester]."

In sober truth, a noble gentleman of Charles' circle, or even the jackal of such a one, felt that he honored an actress by making her his mis-

tress; and there is that enlightening authentic story of a veritable male "Vere de Vere"— Aubrey, twentieth Earl of Oxford, Knight of the Garter and royal intimate, and the surpassingly lovely Mrs. Jane Davenport, chief star of D'Avenant's first feminine galaxy.

His Grace made hot suit to this charmer, whose Roxolana had set the town agog, her admirers maintaining that she far outshone Mrs. Betterton and Mrs. Norton in impersonating this romantic heroine. Finding he could not get her consent by any device of artful gallantry, he decided to take her by the strong arm; and the contemporary story* is related by Edmund Curll in his scrappy "History of the English Stage" [which he faked together from Betterton's papers plus current gossip, and published over Betterton's name in 1741]. The writer, however, mistakenly placed Ann Marshall in the heroine's role in this melodramatic adventure:†

"Grown mad with Love, and her Repulses, he [Oxford] forms a Plot to get her by Force; intending to seize her as she went from the House after she had been acting this Part; which being made known to her, by some real Friend, she obtained a party of the King's Guards to protect her.

"When her Chair appeared, the Nobleman began his assault, but was valiantly repulsed, and she was safely conducted Home.

"This Adventure was the whole Talk of the Court and Town; the Ladies applauded her Resolution secretly, not a little pleased to see their Sex's resolute Behaviour in Roxolana. Many parties were formed both *for* and *against* her. The Fanatics cried out, saying, it was a shame they should bring up Girls in the School of *Venus*, teaching them such Airs

*See also "Grammont's Memoirs," where Mrs. Hobart relates the tale.

†For an account of this error and the true attribution, see Joseph Knight's Preface to the facsimile reprint of "Roscius Anglicanus" by John Downes, 1886, from the original of 1708. Also, especially, "Who was Roxolana?" by W. J. Lawrence [in *The Stage*, Feb. 4, 1929,] in which he clears up the confusion as to the three "Mrs. Davenports."

and Tricks to tempt Mankind. The Gentry liked the Diversion, alledging, the greater the Temptation, the greater the Glory to resist, saying that ladies were bred up in virtuous Sentiments, their Minds improved by high Ideas, and encouraged by the Patronage of the Good and Great.

"However, in this Affair, the King himself having the Story represented to him in the blackest Light, interposed; and his Majesty, with a Freedom natural to one of the best-tempered of Princes, told the Earl, he thought the Vice [though perhaps he gave too much Countenance to it by his own Irregularity] bad enough with the Consent of the Fair, but when Force or Violence was used, it was so heinous, he would not, though a Sovereign, indulge the Thought of such an Action, much more permit it to be done by a Subject.

"This Reproof caused the Earl to answer with some reserve; he said he would think no more of her; but soon after he renewed his Assault, telling her it was impossible to live without her. That, her exalted Virtue had inspired him with other Sentiments, proposing to marry her in private.

"This Bait Roxolana greedily swallowed, her Vanity inclining her to believe the Earl sincere. In short, the Earl comes, brings his Coachman dressed like a Minister [it was really a trumpeter from his cavalry troop, apparently, with a kettle-drummer for witness], Marries her, and took her down to one of his Country-Seats, where soon growing weary of her, he pulled off the Mask, and, with Scorn, bid her return to the Stage."

And when the outraged lady secured access to the King, fell at his feet, and demanded justice for this cynical betrayal—the royal fountain of justice laughed heartily at this cunning jest of his mohock and forced the Earl to provide her with an annuity of £500 a year.

He did, for the look of things, forbid Oxford to marry any more un-

til the child of the fraudulent wedding died: then "concern for so ancient a Family's becoming extinct" caused him to rescind the prohibition.

The "marriage" took place in January or February, 1662; and Mrs. Davenport apparently lived as the Earl's wife about twelve months. The child, Aubrey de Vere was not born till April, 1664.

There was a Mrs. Davenport at Lincoln's Inn Fields in 1663, and E. Davenport and F. Davenport also appear in the lists of 1667; but W. J. Lawrence has recently shown that it was almost certainly Jane who was the deceived Roxolana; and that she came to the Theatre Royal in 1667, having returned to the Duke's company in January, 1663, in time to play Camilla in Tuke's "*Adventure's of Five Hours*, and staying there two years, finally creating another Roxolana in Orrery's tragedy, *Mustapha*. [The Plague closed the theatres for a year and a half.]

Small wonder that Cibber should have such a personal experience as the following to relate, nearly fifty years later:

"Many years ago, when I was first in the Menagement of the Theatre, I remember a strong Instance, which will show you what degree of Ignominy the Profession of an Actor was then held at.—A Lady, with a real Title, whose female Indiscretions had occasion'd her Family to abandon her, being willing, in her Distress, to make an honest Penny of what Beauty she had left, desired to be admitted as an Actress; when before she could receive our Answer, a Gentleman [probably by her Relation's Permission] advis'd us not to entertain her, for Reasons easy to be guess'd.

"You may imagine we cou'd not be so blind to our Interest as to make an honourable Family our unnecessary Enemies by not taking his Advice; which the Lady, too, being sensible of, saw the Affair had its Difficulties, and therefore pursu'd it no farther.

"Now, is it not hard that it should be a doubt whether this Lady's Condition or ours were the more melancholy? For here you find her honest Endeavour to get Bread from the Stage was look'd upon as an Addition of new Scandal to her former Dishonour! so that I am afraid, according to this way of thinking, had the same Lady stoop'd to have sold Patches and Pomatum in a Band-box from Door to Door, she might in that Occupation have starv'd with less Infamy than had she reliev'd her Necessities by being famous on the Theatre.

"Whether this Prejudice may have arisen from the Abuses that have so often crept upon the Stage, I am not clear in; though when that is grossly the Case, I will allow there ought to be no Limits set to the Contempt of it; yet in its lowest Condition in my time, methinks there could have been no Pretence of preferring the Band-box to the Buskin."

Elsewhere our comedian-dramatist-adapter-manager-memoirist presents in his own inimitable way a special problem which confronted some of these displayed and besieged ladies—a conflict between their stage characters and their "private" lives:

"I have formerly known an Actress* carry this Theatrical Prudery to such a Height, that she was very near keeping herself chaste by it: Her Fondness for Virtue on the Stage she began to think might perswade the World that it had made an Impression on her Private Life; and the Appearances of it actually went so far that, in an Epilogue to an obscure Play, the Profits of which were given to her, and wherein she acted a Part of impregnable Chastity, she bespoke the Favour of the Ladies by a Protestation that in Honour of their Goodness and Virtue she would dedicate her unblemish'd Life to their Example. Part of this Vestal Vow, I remember, was contain'd in the following Verse: "Study to live the Character I play."

*Mrs. Rogers, who afterwards lived with Wilks. The play referred to in the anecdote was *The Triumph of Virtue*, produced at Drury-Lane in 1697.

The lines are:

> *"I'll pay this duteous Gratitude, I'll do*
> *That which the Play has done —I'll copy you.*
> *At your own Virtue's Shrine my Vows I'll pay,*
> *Study to live the Character I'll play."*]

"But alas! how weak are the strongest Works of Art when Nature besieges it! for though this good Creature so far held out her Distaste to Mankind that they could never reduce her to marry one of 'em; yet we must own she grew, like Caesar, greater by her Fall!

"Her first heroick Motive to a Surrender was to save the Life of a Lover who in his Despair had vow'd to destroy himself, with which Act of Mercy [in a jealous Dispute once in my Hearing] she was provok'd to reproach him in these very Words, *Villain! did not I save your Life?*"

*Nell Gwyn as Cupid.*

CHAPTER
VII

# *SOME LADIES WHO ACCEPTED FACTS*

OF COURSE there were women of quite different stamp from those who fell in with, and helped to continue, the undignified estate of the early women of the stage. But plenty accepted avidly the tradition of easy accessibility. It paid a lot better. And the comparative valuation of careers by their money returns is not altogether unknown even in our own enlightened times.

Such a realist was Mary [" Moll"] Davis, who captured his Majesty himself one day by her fetching fashion of singing "My Lodging it is on the cold Ground," as Celania, the Gaoler's daughter in *The Rivals*, D'Avenant's alteration of Fletcher's *The Two Noble Kinsmen*—giving the eager wits the opening for the wisecrack that this one song had raised a trollop "from the cold ground to the warm bed Royal." Little that troubled her, in face of her handsome house and a £700 ring, and the militant joy of brazening it against Lady Castlemaine and the patient Queen alike, and knowing she had scored by the endearing term of "impertinent slut" hurled at her by her angry rival.

Also the fair, frail Margaret Hughes, who as Doran remarks was not unlike her own Mrs. Moneylove in *Tom Essence*, a very good sort of person till temptation beset her. Her art was to show her opulent beauty and sell it at the highest price; and by all pragmatic tests she proved herself a finished artist: first of her sex she subdued the scientific recluse Prince Rupert, nephew to the King, in 1668.

This son of the elector palatine and "winter king" of Bohemia, and grandson of James I; dashing cavalry leader, Duke of Cumberland and Earl of Holderness in the English peerage, and member of the Privy Council; was so absorbed in his laboratory [we all remember "Prince Rupert's drops!], in manufacturing gunpowder, improving the boring of guns, inventing a new brass alloy—"prince's metal"—and in practising the new art of mezzotint engraving, the secret of which he had learned from a German officer [his beautiful plate, "Head of St. John the Baptist" is still a collector's prize], that he was despaired of by the devotees of the joyous art of "amour." It was a seven-days' wonder when the whisper ran that he was "that way" about Mrs. Hughes the player, and a jeering court took infinite delight in the affair. Mistress Margaret was not one to appreciate anything about such a rarely talented man, except the gold and jewels which his infatuation showered upon her. She managed to bring this proud, sensitive, open-handed lover to the verge of ruin—and then after his death speedily tossed away the estate he left her, in gambling and a thousand childish follies.

That merry libertine Tom Brown [1663-1704] included among his "Letters from the Dead to the Living"—an imitation of Lucian's "Dialogues of the Dead"—a brief and pithy interchange between Nell Gwyn and Peg Hughes, referring to this spendthrift dissipation of a fortune; and the earnest theatrical chronicler, Rev. John Genest, quotes these barbed epistles solemnly, almost as if much poring over musty records of real people to bring the print back to life had caused him for the moment to take them for actual letters.

Nell writes:

"*Sister Peg,*

Of all the concubines in Christendom, that ever were happy in so kind a keeper, none sure ever squandered away the fruits of her labour so indiscreetly as yourself; whoring and gaming I acknowledge

are two very serviceable vices in a commonwealth, because they make money circulate; but for a woman that has enrich'd herself by the one, to impoverish herself by the other, is so great a fault that a harlot deserves correction for it . . .

"In a few years you have gam'd away the large estate given you by the good old gentleman; fie upon't, I am ashamed to think that a woman who had wit enough to tickle a Prince out of so fine an estate, should at last prove such a fool as to be bubbled out of it by a little spotted ivory and painted paper."

To which the Hughes replies, in intellectual character much beyond the original:

"*Madam*,

I am sorry the mistress of a King should degenerate so much from that generosity which was always applauded as a virtue in us ladies . . .

"Should I have plac'd an esteem upon the riches that was left me, the world might have suppos'd it was for the greediness of gain, that made me yield my favours; and what had I been better than Madam James, or Mrs. Knight of Drury-lane, had I expos'd my honour for the filthy lucre of base coin, and sinn'd on for the sake only of advantage. Beauty's the reward of great actions, and I generously bestow'd mine upon a Prince that deserv'd it, abstractly from the thought of interest, but rather to show my gratitude, in return of his noble passion for me; and since he had made me the object of his affections, I resolv'd thro the true principle of love to surrender the ultimate of my charms to make him happy: my embraces was all he wanted, and the utmost I could give, and if a prince would submit to take up with a player, I think on my side there was honour enough, without interest, to induce me to a compliance . . .

"I am so far from repenting the loss of my estate, that I look upon't

my glory, and the only piece of carelessness I ever committ'd worth my boasting . . .

"When I have lost all, perhaps I may take care to save myself, which will be much better, than like you to be damn'd with a full pocket."

The two Marshall sisters also, children — not of the fine old divine, Stephen Marshall, as often stated — but of a chaplain to Lord Gerard in Staffordshire, were lightweight, harum-scarum pieces, taunted with reason by Nell Gwyn as the "erring daughters of a Praying Presbyterian."

Even Mrs. Knipp [Knep, Kneip, Nep, *ad lib.*] who so enchanted the amorous Mr. Pepys, [and so irritated his wife, "poor wretch"] had hardly enough character to balance her madcap humors and free-and-easy ways. It was, after all, scarcely strange that her unpleasant husband was moody and jealous. There were, for example, plenty of passages between Samuel and this always so welcome "jade" of which dour Mr. Knipp knew nothing; but such a little anecdotal etching as the following, like a Chinese poem, is most eloquent of matters it does not put into words:

"To Knipp's lodging, whom I find not ready to go home with me; and there staid reading of Waller's verses, while she finished dressing, her husband being by. Her lodging very mean, and the condition she lives in; yet makes a show without doors, God bless us."

Animated, pretty, with a sweet voice and quick intelligence, she could do a rakish Lady of Quality, or a pert saucy lady's-maid, a priestess or a milkmaid; and she could dance or sing or rattle off a prologue to perfection.

But after fourteen years she disappears, leaving little trace behind, except in those passages where the inflammable Mr. Pepys tells how she affected him. Those delighted pen-pictures furnish the only portraits of her.

Elizabeth Barry seems to have developed into a much better actress than any of these — an actress made largely in spite of what she was

pray Deare M^r Hue forgive
me for not writing to you before
now for the reason I have for
these three months I have
I have had nothing to intertaine
you withall nor have nothing now
worth writing but that I am
glad to let you know
I have been in any company
without drinking your health
for I love you well and my love
shall will is now to be a maide
please since I have verily lost
M^r Carlton never to be reconciled
againe for he told me he could
not live always at this rate
& he begun to be a little unwell
when I could not differ from an
ugly faux garson Ms Knights

Lady mother's dead & she has
put us a scutchin no bigger then
my Lady arms scutcheis My Lord
Rochester upon in the country
Mr Davil has got a misfortune.
but is upon recovery & is no way
an Enemies who I think wont
wont have an ill time out if he
holds in his thumb My Lord
of Dorset a little worse in three
months got to be drunker nile now
I had work & Mr Davis at the Duke
house all day long my Lord
Burford remembers his service
to you my Lord Bauclaire is
is going into France we
are a going to Juke with the
King at Windsor & my Lady
Davis the Ring remembers his

fayres to you now lets talke
of state affairs for we never
saw things so cunningly as
now for we dont know whether
we shall have warr or
no but I am for warr and for
no other reason but that you
may come home I have a thous=
and thing to say but I cant make
her write um & therfore you
must take the will for the deed
so bye your most loving
obedient faithfull & humble

Servant

E G

## Text *of* Nell Gwyn Letter *to* Lawrence Hyde

*pray Deare Mr. Hide forgive me for not writing to you before now for the reasone is I have ben sik thre months & sinse I recovered I have had nothing to entertaine you withall nor have nothing now worth writing but that I can holde no longer to let you knowe I never have ben in any companie without drinking your health for I love you with all my soule. The pel mel is now to me a dismale plase sinse I have uterly lost Sir Car Scrope never to be recovered againe for he tould me he could not live allwayes at this rate & so begune to be a littel uncivil which I could not sufer from an uglye baux garscon. Mrs. Knight's Lady mother's dead & she has put up a scutcheon no beiger then . . . Lady Quin's . . . My Lord Rochester is gon in the cuntree. Mr. Savil has got a misfortune but is upon recovery & is to mary an hairres who I thinke wont wont have an ill time on't if he holds up his thumbe. My Lord of Dorset apiers worse in thre months, for he drinkes aile with Shadwell & Mr. Haris at the Duke's house (the Theatre) all day long. My lord Burford remembers his sarvis to you. My Lord Bauclaire is is goeing into France. We are a-goeing to supe with the king at Whitehall & my lady Harvie the king remembers his sarvis to you. now lets talk of state affairs for we never caried things so cuningly as now, for we dont know whether we shall have piece or war but I am for war and for no other reason but that you may come home. I have a thousand merry conseits but I cant make her write um & therefore you must take the will for the deed. god bye your most loving obedient faithfull & humbel*

*Servant*

*E. G.*

born. In his preface to *Cleomenes*, Dryden, speaking of this more finished product, declares: "Mrs. Barry in this Tragedy excell'd herself, and gain'd a reputation beyond any woman I have seen on the stage."

Dr. Doran, in his "Annals of the English Stage," has made a special study of Mrs. Barry, taking a pilgrimage to the country church where she was buried. He pronounces her unquestionably the most famous of the 17th Century actresses, and compares her to "the Champmeslè so noted in France, pointing out that all contemporary audiences allowed no greater actress, with the single exception of Mrs. Betterton as Lady Macbeth. Dibdin adds the testimony that she was the first woman "who was indulged with a benefit play, a favour for some time after given only as a distinction of merit."

Her father was a barrister, who lost everything but the barren title of Colonel by his adherence to the King's cause; and, as not uncommon, the unprotected girl became maid to Lady Shelton. Lady D'Avenant, a connection of the dramatist, befriended her and in 1673, when Elizabeth was fifteen, succeeded in placing her with Sir William's company —where she showed so little promise that she was dismissed [Curll says three times!] as hopeless stage material.

"She could neither sing, nor dance, no, not in a Country-Dance," declares Aston, of personal observation. "This fine Creature was not handsome, herMouth op'ning most on the Right Side, which she strove to draw t'other Way, and at Times, composing her Face, as if sitting to have her Picture drawn." To add to her handicap, though her voice was good, her ear was so defective that it seemed she could never learn the finer points of dramatic speaking.

A group of fine gentlemen, watching her heavy efforts as they would have watched the trials of a colt on the race-track, announced their verdict that the girl would never make an actress. Whereupon the Earl of Rochester arrogantly offered to bet that in six months he could turn the

awkward novice into the finest woman player on the stage. That was a bit strong even for the clever Earl's toadies.

"He was opposed by them all, and tho' they knew him to be a Person of excellent Sense, yet they thought on this Subject, he had started beyond the Bounds of his Judgment; and so many poignant things were said to him on this Occasion, that they piqued him into a Resolution of taking such Pains with Mrs. *Barry*, as to convince them he was not mistaken.

"From the Moment he had this Dispute, he became intimately acquainted with her, but to the World he kept it private, especially from those he had argued with about her. He soon, by talking with her, found her Mistress of exquisite Charms; and it was thought he never loved any Person so sincerely as he did Mrs. *Barry*. Whoever has the Mind to see him in the Form of a Lover, may find him shine in the Letters annexed to his Poems," [bound up with the Tragedy of *Valentinian*] "Mrs. *Barry* being the Person to whom those Letters were addressed.

"The first Parts Lord Rochester chose to teach Mrs. Barry, were the *Little Gipsy*, in the Comedy of *The Rover*, by Mrs. Behn: and *Isabella*, the *Hungarian Queen*, in the Tragedy of *Mustapha*, by the E. of *Orrery:* which [besides the private Instructions he gave her] he made her rehearse near 30 times on the Stage, and about 12 in the Dress she was to act it in. He took such extraordinary Pains with her, as not to omit the least Look of Motion, nay, I have been assured from them who were present, that her Page was taught to manage her Train, in such a Manner so as to give each Movement a peculiar Grace.

"But before I mention what Success the Peer had with his Pupil, to give the Reader a clearer Idea, it was certain Mrs. *Barry* was Mistress of a very good Understanding, yet she having little, or no Ear for Music, which caused her to be thought dull when she was taught by the Actors, because she could not readily catch the Manner of their sound-

ing Words, but run into a Tone, the Fault of most young Players; this Defect my Lord perceiving, he made her enter into the Nature of each Sentiment, perfectly changing herself, as it were, into the Person, not merely by the proper Stress or Sounding of the Voice, but feeling really, and being in the Humour, the Person she represented, was supposed to be in . . .

"As no Age ever produced a Person better skilled in the Passions and Foibles of Mankind than my Lord *Rochester*, so none was more capable of instructing her to give those heightening Strokes which surprized and delighted all who saw her."

It was at first another Pygmalion trying to carve responsiveness, or at least the appearance of it, out of a human block.

In addition to this patient drilling, this imposing of his own superior perception upon his pupil, my Lord also awakened in her a passion of personal feeling which has been many times responsible for a woman's complete emotional transformation as an artist.

His own affections speedily became far more deeply involved than had been the case in any of his numberless amatory adventures. There may have been more than a touch of Narcissism in this passion—yet it was surely there. But deeply as he had fallen in love with her, the noble gamester had by no means forgot his wager.

On the night of her debut as the Hungarian Queen, probably in 1674, he brought a notable company, including the King, the Queen, and the Duke and Duchess of York, to witness this first showing of his creation —and help confound the rash wagerers who had spurred his conceit to attempt the hopeless venture.

Amid this brilliant and astonished audience he sat, in satisfied pride, egoism and love, while the sixteen-year-old girl he had so skilfully moulded scored a wild success.

"The whole Theatre resounded with Applause; the Dutchess of *York*

was so pleased, that from Mrs. *Barry* she learned to improve in the *English* Language, made her a Present of her Wedding-Suit, and favoured her in so particular a Manner, not only whilst Dutchess, but when Queen, it is said, she gave her her Coronation Robes to act *Queen Elizabeth*, in *The Earl of Essex*."

The young player continued to improve; she got parts better suited to her capacities; and in 1680, when she created the part of Monimia in Otway's The *Orphan* [with little six-year-old Ann Bracegirdle making her first appearance as the page] she took critics and public by storm. Thenceforth in her own field she had no rival, and for a third of a century she continued to grow in dramatic power and acting skill.

But "private instructions" at fifteen from the Earl of Rochester were perhaps more salutary for the actress than the woman. She had a daughter by Rochester, and he seems always to have cared for her, leaving her an annuity in his will when he died in 1680. Some of his letters to her are delightful, "elegantly polite" as Curll puts it, and showing genuine feeling and a respect which his Lordship exhibited for few members of the other sex. She became rich and famous: "Instead of as in former days, when the play was over, the attendant boy used to call for 'Mrs. Barry's clogs!' or 'Mrs. Bracegirdle's pattens!' it became 'Mrs. Barry's chair!' "

Yet the testimony is that she permitted herself to be passed around most miscellaneously. After a period under Rochester's protection, she was luckless Otway's mistress, and Etheredge's, and heaven knows who else's; Nicholls accepts the contemporary description of her as a woman who would "spend the night with a man, take all his money, and refuse to recognize him the following morning unless he could scrape together another pitiful five guineas."

It may be. In that case she simply reflected the character and ideals of many of the fine gentlemen, not to mention the "ladies of quality," with

Sir Jt. Lely pinx.t

Engraved by J. Green Engraver to
his Majesty & to the Elector Palatine.

# ELEANOR GWYNN.

From an Original Picture in the Collect.n of the late Duke of Buckingham.

Publishd Nov.r 17.th 1777, by W. Shropshire, N.o 458, New Bond Street.

whom she came in contact, and whom she was expected to reverence and envy.

One final evidence of the facts confronting these early stage women is the money value placed on their professional services.

Mrs. Charlotte Butler, as late as 1692, was "an actress of great repute and a prodigious favourite with King Charles the Second." Yet Cibber relates that she deserted the English stage and accepted Asbury's offer to star in the reviving Dublin theatre—because she was refused an addition of ten shillings a week to her salary of forty shillings!

It took a lot of character for a woman in this cynical atmosphere, looked down on socially, yet associating intimately with noble gallants who thought nothing of staking a hundred or a thousand guineas on a whim, who spent money like water on their gay pleasures, to consider living on such a starveling pittance—when there were plenty of eager offerers of high prices for what she had to sell outside of her talent.

D'Avenant has one of his characters express the alternative choice for an "honest" woman in *The Wits*, where Lucy declares:

> " *Pall: whose kindness I*
> *Perceive will raise me to such dignity,*
> *That I must teach children in a dark cellar,*
> *Or work coifs for crack'd groats*
> *And broken meats*"

Those types, who decided that a personal, exclusive sex choice was not worth this huge difference, have always been common enough.

But, taking a difficult example to start with, it would be a bold and self-righteous chronicler who would declare that rollicking Nell Gwyn was a disgrace to her profession!

Frankly and unashamedly a courtezan was Nelly, and doubtless proud of being the best of her time, no less than a King's favorite. Her success as an actress was mainly due to her being herself—that quite

irresistible self which had no more pretension than she would tolerate in those others whose pomposity she delighted to puncture.

Her colorful life has been written again and again.

She was apparently the daughter of a broken-down Welsh soldier and a poor slatternly drab who finally, in 1679, fell while drunk into a pond in Chelsea and was drowned. Nell herself declared she was born in a brothel. Brought up on the streets, her native quickness not only acquired a fund of what would now be termed snappy comebacks, but a super-fishwife's vocabulary of vituperation.

Suddenly translated from Moll the orange-girl to Madam Ellen Gwyn, whom the King delighted to honor, in many ways the most powerful figure at the royal Court, she altered not one whit her light-hearted, laughing, whimsical, shrewdly vulgar manner of meeting the world as it came along—and making it burst into a guffaw. Asking and giving no quarter when attacked, she was none-the-less most kindly, human and generous, with a broad rollicking sense of fun, and an utter disregard of anything but the moment's whim which was like a breath of fresh air among that cynical yet pretentious society. Scorn was wasted on her: she had cracked a bawdy jest upon her past before the fine ladies raised their eyebrows and whispered around her; and it is difficult to attack successfully a person devoid of solemn humbug, who really enjoys a joke even on herself. As for her own folk of the London streets, they loved her and had an infinite pride in her.

Sir Peter Lely, who had succeeded Van Dyck as Court Painter, must have spent most of his time in painting Nelly—in every sort of dress and undress, for the King, for Buckingham, for any great noble important enough or lucky enough; and the sheer spirit and fascination of her are preserved for ever in some of these canvases, and the many copperplate engravings and mezzotints made from them and other originals.

I suppose in a cold professional survey one would have to admit she

was but a second-rate actress, even during the few years when she trod the boards of Drury-Lane. But she did appear with applause in a number of parts, including tragedies, though she once said to the audience [in the Epilogue to the *Duke of Lerma*]:

> " *I know you in your hearts*
> *Hate serious plays, as I do serious parts.*"

Among her characters, most of them "creations" were: Cydaria in *Indian Emperour*, Lady Wealthy in *English Mounsieur*, Florimel in *Secret Love*, Flora in *Flora's Vagaries*, Alizia in *Black Prince*, Mirida in *All Mistaken*, Bellaris in *Philaster*, Jacinta in *Evening's Love*, Celia in *Humorous Lieutenant*, Valeria in *Tyrannick Love*, Almahide in *Conquest of Granada*, Angelica Bianca in *Rover*, Astraea in *Constant Nymph*, Thalestris in *Siege of Babylon*, Lady Squeamish in *Friendship in Fashion*, Lady Knowell in *Sir Patient Fancy*, Sunamire in *Loyal Brother*, and, 1682, Queen Elizabeth in *The Unhappy Favourite*.

Her best parts, naturally enough, were those where she had merely to exhibit her own delightfully effervescent nature—and it might well be maintained that there was more in that worth watching and listening to than in many of the playwright's studied characters. When she was herself she was at her best. And she wore her flauntings of conventional morality like a gay plume fluttering in the breeze.

She was small of stature, rather plump, and had reddish brown hair and small feet. When she laughed, which was often, her eyes became almost invisible. "The indiscreetest and wildest creature that ever was in a Court," pronounces one observer.

Clearly, whether she was making bored Charles laugh by her gamine wit and antics, or abandoning her public triumphs and flood of easy money to skimp it on £100 a year in seclusion with clever young Lord Buckhurst, for whom she had a veritable passion—she belongs in that

line of baffling historic women, from nobodies to queens, who sold their charm, yet who preserved some inner integrity of character upon which propriety's contempt splinters ineffectively.

And they baffle something far deeper than that "propriety" which is a screaming joke to the Gallic mind. I fancy most sensible men, while listening with a smile, find the expressed contemporary advanced ideas of "sex-freedom" both cheap and silly. Promiscuousness strikes them as not only slovenly, like a lady in a sloppy Mother Hubbard, but, if one is to discuss the matter seriously, as highly ineffective in expressing that sex urge which all admit among man's primal impulses. It is not recorded in any known version of the myth that Don Juan was a satisfied man; and the Roman historians outdid themselves to explain just how unsatisfied was that imperial Messalina, who seems a complete historic embodiment and "end-product" of the perfect sex freedom advocated by our pioneering youth and some cold-blooded social theorists.

So perhaps it can be taken for granted that these same sensible folk [even if they have not reached that age alluded to by Colley Cibber in his paean on Mrs. Bracegirdle!] are quietly sure a fine art of life must contain some real personal choice in these matters, some control—giving up the casual for what counts for more and is spoiled by the casual.

Consequently, these ladies who gave up nothing but their reputations present a problem.One would like to place them accurately—not with any thought of setting the world straight, but just to satisfy one's own mind.

This much at least is sure of some: breaking all the rules laid down by both sexes, they nevertheless cannot be dismissed with a cynical shrug; there is too much reality, too much sheer personality. No profession which included that laughing orange-girl can be ignored! Even Society, clinging to rules jealously enforced, spoke its true mind in the place rendered Nell Gwyn's ennobled children: the Duke of St. Albans is tenth in an honored line.

CHAPTER
VIII

# *WHAT MARY SAUNDERSON DID FOR THE PROFESSION*

NELL was one of the splendid sinners, defying classification. The case is clear enough when we come to that Mary Saunderson who married Thomas Betterton, and who, in a time when most people would have smiled knowingly at the idea of an actress's being virtuous, set a standard of quiet personal dignity which proved that a woman player could be what she would.

One of D'Avenant's original principals, she created, as we have seen, the part of Ianthe [opposite her future husband as Solyman the Magnificent] in the enlarged real stage version of *The Siege of Rhodes*.

Four months later, her name changed to Betterton, she was in the cast of *Cutter of Coleman Street*—a Cutter being a swaggerer, one who cuts a dash—a rewritten and improved version of Cowley's *The Guardian*, which had been played before the Royal Prince in 1641—as he passed through Cambridge on his way to York.

She was the wonder of her time as Lady Macbeth; played Ophelia to Betterton's much-praised Hamlet; Juliet, with Betterton as Mercutio, Harris being the Romeo; Belmont in Porter's *The Villain*, which packed the Duke of York's Theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields for ten days; Queen Katherine in *Henry VIII* and Princess Katherine in *Henry V;* Graciana in *Comical Revenge, or, Love in a Tub;* the Duchess in Webster's *Dutchess of Malfy;* Roxolana again in Lord Orrery's *Mustapha;* Mon-

dana in Settle's *Cambysses;* Pulcheria in Nat. Lee's *Theodosius, or The Force of Love*, 1680; Elvira in Dryden's *Spanish Fryar;* Camilla in *The Royalist* [early 1682]; and heaven knows how many more stock parts and creations.

I find her name only once in any cast after the consummation of the Union between the Theatre Royal and the Duke of York's Players. She was the Queen Mother in Lee's tragedy *The Massacre of Paris*, produced at the Theatre Royal in 1690—the same year that Colley Cibber joined the company as a scared boy of nineteen, first put on the salary list by an angry Betterton so that he could be fined a half-week's pay for a blunder which had upset the star!

This Union of the two theatres followed an agreement, of October, 1681, between Dr. Charles D'Avenant and Betterton, which took away Kynaston and Hart from the King's Company; the patentees of the two organizations joined forces that next year, and at once removed to the Theatre Royal; Killegrew presently died, and there was a new line-up.

Nell Gwyn, too, dropped out at the Union, the chief women stars now being: Mrs. Barry, Mrs. Cook, Mrs. Percival [afterwards wife to Mountfort], Mrs. Butler, Mrs. Petty, Mrs. Twiford, Mrs. Leigh, Mrs. Baker, Mrs. Price, Mrs. Osborn, Mrs. Cory, Mrs. Knight, and Lady Slingsby. [This Dame Mary Slingsby, widow, of St. James Parish, acted from 1675-80 under the name of Mary Lee, then for four years under her proper title. She died in 1693/4.]

Long before her retirement Mary Saunderson Betterton had made a secure place for herself in the hearts and admiration of all who knew her.

Genest quotes of her later period:

"Mrs. Betterton, tho' far advanced in years was yet so great a mistress of nature, that even Mrs. Barry, who acted Lady Macbeth after her, could not in that part, with all her superior strength and melody

of voice, throw out those quick and careless strokes of terror, from the disorder of a guilty mind, which the other gave the audience, with a facility in her manner, that rendered them at once tremendous and delightful; time could not impair her skill tho' it had brought her person to decay; she was to the last the admiration of all true judges of nature and lovers of Shakespeare, in whose plays she chiefly excelled; and when she quitted the stage several good actresses were the better for her instruction."

Married to her famous husband for just short of a half-century, no scandal or lack of dignity seems to have touched this fine lady, who, quite unconsciously, was setting up a new standard for women of the stage who cared about that sort of thing.

The scholarly Dr. Doran pays his tribute:

"For about thirty years she played the chief female characters, especially in Shakespeare's plays, with great success. She created as many new parts as she played years; but they were in old-world pieces, which have been long forgotten.

"In the home which she kept with her husband, charity, hospitality and dignity abided. So unexceptionable was Mrs. Betterton's character, that when Crowne's *Calisto* was to be played at Court in 1674, she was chosen to be instructress to the Lady Mary and the Lady Anne. These princesses derived from Mrs. Betterton's lessons the accomplishment for which both were distinguished when queens, of pronouncing speeches from the throne in a clear and distinct voice, with sweetness of intonation and grace of enunciation.

"Mrs. Betterton subsequently instructed the Princess Anne in the part of Semandra, and her husband did the like office for the young noblemen who also played in Lee's rattling tragedy of *Mithridates*. Two individuals better qualified by their professional skill and their moral character, to instruct the young princesses and courtiers, and to exer-

cise over them a wholesome authority, could not then have been found on or off the stage. After Betterton's death [1710] Queen Anne settled on her old teacher of elocution a pension of £500 a year."

Strange as it seems in the case of an actress who was a great tragedienne of her time, who was the honored wife of the leading actor, who was the valued instructor and friend for many years of two queens — there is no portrait extant of her.

But she left an indelible likeness in the impression made in the minds of all. First of her time, she was almost the first to show that a woman could charm the public yet be universally respected.

# SECRET-LOVE,

OR THE

# Maiden-Queen:

As it is Acted

By His Majesties Servants,

AT THE

THEATER-ROYAL.

Written by

JOHN DRYDEN, Esq;

---

*——Vitiis nemo sine nascitur; optimus ille*
*Qui minimis urgetur.* HORACE.

---

LONDON,
Printed for *Henry Herringman*, at the Sign of the *Anchor*, on the lower walk of the New-*Exchange*, 1669.

*A Very* RARE PROGRAM *at the* THEATRE ROYAL

*Dryden's Secret Love, or The Maiden Queen, with*
*Ann Marshall, Nell Gwynn and Mrs. Knipp in the cast.*

[SEE PEPYS' DIARY, MARCH 2, 1667]

# The Persons.

| | |
|---|---|
| Queen of *Sicily* | Mrs *Marshall* |
| *Candiope*, Princes of the Blood | Mrs *Quin.* |
| *Asteria*, the Queens Confident | Mrs *Knep.* |
| *Florimel*, A Maid of Honour | Mrs *Ellen Gwyn* |
| *Flavia*, another Maid of Honour | Mrs *Frances Davenport.* |
| *Olinda*, Sisters. | Mrs *Rutter.* |
| *Sabina*, Sisters. | Mrs. *Eliz. Davenport.* |
| *Melissa*, Mother to *Olinda* and *Sabina* | Mrs. *Cory.* |
| *Lysimantes*, first Prince of the Blood | Mr. *Burt.* |
| *Philocles*, the Queens favourite | Major *Mohun.* |
| *Celadon*, a Courtier | Mr. *Hart.* |

Guards.
Pages of Honour.
Souldiers.

The Scene *SICILY.*

CHAPTER
IX

# *THE FASCINATING MRS. BRACEGIRDLE*

THE end of this century and the first years of the next brought before the public two young women who did more than perhaps any others to establish a tradition of, let us say, passionate adoration tinged with respect for the charming, spirited actress. These were Ann Bracegirdle and Nance Oldfield.

Mrs. Bracegirdle is usually stated to have been an orphan who, as a small child, was placed under the care of Thomas Betterton and his good wife. [But in the official inquiry on her attempted abduction, described later, her mother is referred to.]

She was only six when she made her first appearance — as already related in that 1680 production of the new Otway play *The Orphan, or The Unhappy Marriage* in which Barry scored her decisive triumph, as the afflicted Monimia, and thus "gain'd the Name of Famous Mrs. Barry, both at Court and City;" for as the highly susceptible Downes avers, "when ever She Acted any of those three Parts, she forc'd Tears from the Eyes of her Auditory, especially those who have any Sense of Pity for the Distres't."

Little Ann acquitted herself well as the page: Curll declares "to the Admiration of all Spectators;" and the Bettertons saw to it that she had sound instruction and plenty of training and experience in the next few years.

Her second recorded public effort [unless she was the "Miss Nanny" who took the character of Clita in *The Commonwealth of Women* in 1685] seems to have been her true debut, as Lucia in Shadwell's rattling comedy, *The Squire of Alsatia*,—which was such a hit that it brought the author for his third day's receipts £130 [with box seats at four shillings, lower gallery at one-and-six, and upper gallery a shilling], and "vast numbers" had to be turned away because of full houses during its astonishing run of thirteen days.

That same year the fourteen-year girl appeared in Mountfort's *Injured Lovers;* then as Julia, Lady Stately's daughter, in Crowne's *English Friar; or, The Town Sparks;* as the Rosaria of Shadwell's *Amorous Bigot*, Bianca in *Successful Strangers*—where she spoke the Prologue, the Indian Queen in a posthumous play by Aphra Behn, *Widow Ranter; or, The History of Bacon in Virginia*, Miranda in Joseph Harris's *Mistakes*, and so on. It was not a life of ease for an adolescent girl.

She had already won for herself the repute of being one of the most captivating creatures of the boards. Cibber, though a discreetly zealous partisan of her rival, thus describes her:

"Mrs. *Bracegirdle* was now but just blooming to her Maturity; her Reputation as an Actress gradually rising with that of her Person. Never any Woman was in such general Favour of her Spectators—which, to the last Scene of her Dramatick Life, she maintained, by not being unguarded in her private Character. This Discretion contributed not a little to make her the *Cara*, the Darling of the Theatre; For it will be no extravagant Thing to say, scarce an Audience saw her that were less than half her Lovers, without a suspected Favourite among them. And tho' she might be said to have been the Universal Passion, and under the highest Temptations, her Constancy in resisting them served but to increase the Number of her Admirers:

"And this perhaps you will more easily believe when I extend not

my Enconiums on her Person beyond a Sincerity than can be suspected; for she had no greater Claim to Beauty* than what the most desirable Brunette might pretend to. But her Youth and lively Aspect threw out such a Glow of Health and Cheerfulness, that on the Stage few Spectators that were not past it could behold her without Desire.

"It was even a Fashion among the Gay and Young to have a Taste or Tendre for Mrs. *Bracegirdle*. She inspired the best Authors to write for her, and two of them" [Rowe and Congreve] "when they gave her a Lover in a Play, seem'd palpably to plead their own Passions, and make their private Court to her in fictitious Characters.

"In all the chief Parts she acted, the Desirable was so predominant, that no Judge could be cold enough to consider from what other particular Excellence she became delightful.

"To speak critically of an Actress that was extremely good were as hazardous as to be positive in one's opinion of the best Opera Singer. People often judge by Comparison where there is no Similitude in the Performance. So that, in this Case, we have only Taste to appeal to, and of Taste there can be no disputing. I shall therefore only say of Mrs. *Bracegirdle*, That the most eminent Authours always chose her for their favourite Characters, and shall leave that uncontestable Proof of her Merit to its own Value.

"Yet let me say, there were two very different Characters in which she acquitted herself with uncommon Applause: If any thing could excuse that desperate Extravagance of Love, that almost frantick passion of Lee's *Alexander the Great*, it must have been when Mrs. *Bracegirdle* was his *Statira:* As when she acted Millamont" [in Congreve's *Way of the World*] "all the Faults, Follies, and Affectations of that agreeable Tyrant were venially melted down into so many Charms and Attractions of a conscious Beauty. In other Characters, where Singing was a

*Tony Aston testifies far otherwise — see end of Chapter X.

necessary Part of them, her Voice and Action gave a Pleasure which good Sense, in those Days was not asham'd to give Praise to."

She was surely an instinctive and natural charmer, the little Bracegirdle, and she conquered her public most convincingly. She alone was sufficient reason for crowding to the play.

Bad times came for the theatre proprietors in 1690 and 1691. Two sumptuous and expensive "dramatick operas," *The Prophetess* and *King Arthur*, rolled up a heavy deficit for them. After the fashion of pressed business men [in those days, of course], they decided to reduce the players' salaries, beginning with the stars; and to render these principals more amenable to reason, they planned several productions in which Betterton's best parts were assigned to a beginner, young Powell, and Mrs. Barry's to the youthful sensation, Bracegirdle.

But, "tho' the giddy Head of Powel accepted the Parts of Betterton, Mrs. *Bracegirdle* had a different way of thinking, and desir'd to be excus'd from those of Mrs. Barry; her good Sense was not to be misled by the insidious Favour of the Patentees; she knew that the Stage was wide enough for her Success without ent'ring into any such rash and invidious Competition with Mrs. Barry, and therefore wholly refus'd acting any Part that properly belong'd to her."

The distinguished Betterton, and Mrs. Barry, strangely failed to appreciate this stroke of subterranean policy devised by the managers. He promptly organized a group of the leading figures in the company, "who, to secure their Unity, enter'd with him into a sort of Association, to stand or fall together." [There seems to have taken form the first anticipation of the modern Actors Equity.]

Whereupon there were excursions and alarums: the Patentees also formed their Association, and rejected all peace offers from the Actors —though in a few months the theatre showed a loss of at least a thousound pounds because of the squabble.

SCENE *from* SECRET LOVE
*or the Maiden's Queen*

Betterton, Mrs. Barry, and Mrs. Bracegirdle, representing their party, appealed for justice to Lord Dorset, then Lord Chamberlain; and with the backing of Sir Robert Howard he secured for them from King William a separate license for a company of their own. Included in this seceding group was the still unnoticed youngster, Colley Cibber, vastly pleased at having his pay raised to over a dollar a day.

This resulted in the embattled players' opening, April 30, 1695, a new theatre in one of those former tennis-courts which so frequently served for a new temple of Thespis. This one was in Lincoln's-Inn-Fields; and for the premiere of this venture they secured a fresh and sparkling comedy by Congreve, *Love for Love*.

As Angelica, captivating Mrs. Bracegirdle greatly helped the success which greeted them: the play ran for thirteen days, as did *The Mourning Bride* which followed. Her spirited acting and singing also made a hit of *Don Quixote;* and when she enthralled the crowd in Crowne's short-lived *Justice Busy*, intoxicated Downes tries to describe the effect by averring that she "by a Potent and Magnetick Charme in performing a Song in't, *caus'd the Stones* in the Streets to fly in the Men's Faces!"

Her Potent and Magnetick Charme had shortly before this literally caused other things to fly in men's faces, in a real tragedy more comprehensible than the complicated phenomenon vouched for by the worthy chronicler — who had an exceedingly low flash-point, as the chemists put it, when exposed to the charms of the stage ladies; his duties as "book-keeper" [custodian of the texts and prompter] constantly placed his inflammability between the Court beauties of the audience and the seductive personalities of the actresses.

Ann was eighteen, in the opening flower of her fresh young charm, spirited, arch, independent, full of the fire and distinctive personality which is so irresistible in a lovely girl.

Among the throng of men who laid siege to her, honorably and dis-

honorably, was a certain Captain Richard Hill, a swaggering, roystering, brutal military gentleman, with all the haughty arrogance of his class in that period, when His Majesty's army and navy were exclusive clubs, and a Colonel, or even a Captain, was but one step lower than the angels of the nobility. A contemporary sums him up by stating that Nature seemed to have designed him for a cut-throat,—and the Captain had but placed the refinements of social customs on nature's plan. He aspired to distinction among the mohocks, aping dark Mohun, whose particular jackal he was.

This loud bully, being repulsed in his earlier approaches, and being inflamed by the repute of the actress who was the toast of the town, condescended, through an extremity of desire, to propose marriage. Honor enough that, for a playing wench!

She refused him, decisively. And the man's blistered vanity covered up its deep hurt with the slanderous explanation that this was because she had a liaison with William Mountfort, the talented young actor, who had joined the King's Company as a boy and in 1685 had made a huge success in the part of Sir Courtly Nice. [All the critics said that none but Colley Cibber ever equalled him in this popular comedy of Crowne's.]

Mountfort was married, happily, to another member of the company, Miss Percival [who later became Mrs. Verbruggen]; and there is not the slightest indication that the story was anything but irresponsible gossip about attractive members of the same troupe—said to be not entirely unknown even in this twentieth century. But he was handsome and still young; Mrs. Bracegirdle had the previous season played Maria, in love with Lord Mountacute [Mountfort] in *King Edward III;* during this year of 1692 she had acted opposite him in *Wives Excuse; or, Cuckolds make Themselves*, and in *Cleomenes, the Spartan Hero;* and finally, as a writer of the time rather quaintly explains it, he had "always show'd Mrs. Bracegirdle respect."

What more evidence could be needed by the desperately wounded amour propre of an officer and a gentleman, insulted by the indifference of a light woman of the stage?

Of course something had to be done to wipe out this blot upon the honor of the Army and the Hills. The officer swore publicly in his cups he would have Mountfort's blood for this impudent rivalry—existing only in his own inflamed fancy.

Then he had the more pleasant inspiration of emulating the earlier attempt of the chivalrous Earl of Oxford.

Brawling, rowdy, deadly Mohun was his closest friend—Mohun who had stood trial for murder before he was seventeen, because of what he called a duel.

This precious pair put their wits together, and decided that the way to treat this impudent hussy and her airs of Virtue was to carry her off and violate her; and then perhaps, if Hill still wanted her, he could marry her. As for the player dog, that was a simple matter.

So they got necessary information through spies. Then on Friday, December 9, 1692, they hired a coach and six from Dixon, to take them to Totteridge, and ordered the driver to await them in front of the Horse-shoe Tavern in Drury-lane. With military foresight, they had provided a small company of soldiers to assist in this glorious exploit, and posted them beside the coach.

Mrs. Bracegirdle had supped that winter evening at the house of a friend, Mr. Page, in Prince's-street. About ten o'clock she and her mother left the house, escorted by their host, and started down Drury-lane toward their lodgings in Howard-street.

As they came opposite the Horse-shoe, two of these soldiers stepped forward and seized the actress, knocking her mother and Page to one side.

The mother, though partially stunned, threw her arms around her daughter's neck and clung desperately, resisting the efforts of these ruf-

fians to drag the young woman to the waiting coach, while Page shouted for help.

Upon this Hill ran up with drawn sword, theatening to run him through if he did not immediately hold his tongue; and the chief abductor then tried to pull his prize from her mother's grasp and force her into the vehicle.

But the affair had become too public. Windows were raised, people ran up. Mrs. Bracegirdle was too popular a favorite for such a high-handed outrage to be safe with so many witnesses.

So, loudly cursing the old woman and the noisy citizen, Hill saved his face by impudently insisting on seeing the lady safely home, having a fear, he declared, for her security.

He did actually lead her by the hand to her lodgings.

All this time Lord Mohun had been sitting in the coach, ready to receive the kidnapped lady and hold her fast. Seeing the plan had gone awry, he now joined his friend—and the two paraded in front of Mrs. Bracegirdle's door, with swords drawn, for an hour and a half, making a brave show of protecting the lady from some mysterious danger. When challenged by the prudent watch, who could at last not avoid investigating, Mohun sheathed his blade, but Hill's scabbard had been lost in the scuffle.

The lodging-house keeper Mrs. Brown, went out to protest to the two bravoes; and some hot word of the exasperated Hill showed her how the wind blew: she quietly sent one of her maids to Mountfort's house nearby in Norfolk-street, to warn Mrs. Mountfort this angry pair intended to vent their frustrated anger on her husband.

Mountfort was not there, and all of his wife's efforts to reach him were unsuccessful.

Between eleven and twelve, the watch, making their rounds, found Mohun and Hill tippling in the street, a drawer having brought them

ELIZ^TH BARRY.

*From an Original Picture by S^r Godfrey Kneller,*

*in the Collection of the R^t Hon. the Earl of Cowper at Panshanger Herts*

*London Pub^d by T.R. S. Harding No. 132 Pall Mall*

wine from a neighboring tavern; and Mrs. Brown besought these guarddians of the law to take the two mohocks into custody; but the discreet officers had no mind to interfere with a nobleman's diversions on complaint of a lodging-house proprietor.

Thus the tragedy moved to its appointed end.

"Seeing Mountfort,* just as he had turned the corner into Howard-street, and was apparently coming towards her house, Mrs. Brown hurried out to meet him, and mention his danger, but he would not stop, so as to allow her time for the slightest communication.

"On gaining the spot where Lord Mohun stood, Hill being a little further off, he saluted his lordship with great respect, and was received by him with unequivocal kindness. Lord Mohun hinted to Mountfort that he had been sent for by Mrs. Bracegirdle, in consequence of her projected seizure, a charge which Mountfort immediately denied.

"Lord Mohun then touched upon the affair, and Mountfort expressed a hope, with some warmth that he would not vindicate Hill's share in the business, against which, while disclaiming any tenderness for Mrs. Bracegirdle, he protested with asperity.

"Hill, approached in time to catch the substance of Mountfort's remark, and having hastily said that he could vindicate himself, gave him a blow on the ear, and at the same moment a challenge to fight.

"They both went from the pavement into the middle of the road, and after making two or three passes at each other, Mountfort was mortally wounded. He threw down his sword, which broke by the fall, and staggered to his own house, where Mrs. Page, who had gone to concert withMrs.Mountfort for her husband's safety, hearing a cry of 'murder' in the street, threw open the door, and received him, pale, bleeding and exhausted, in her arms."

---

*Bellchambers, 1822, based on the full evidence brought out at the trial. [Supplement to Cibber's "Apology."]

This dastardly affair raised a mighty protest. It was a bit too raw an abuse of even firmly-intrenched military and aristocratic privilege. And when the news came next day that Mountfort was dead, a storm broke about the ears of the two mohocks. The Captain again acted on approved principles of military strategy when faced by superior force: he fled to the Continent, and escaped his just deserts. Mohun, with all his blackness, had some basic characteristics of a gentleman. He met the issue and surrendered—and his trial for murder, as accessory before the fact, became a *cause celèbre*.

The case was tried in Westminster Hall before the House of Lords; and since the voluminous testimony failed to prove that Mohun directly assisted Hill in the assassination [Mountfort was no swordsman and his assailant was skilled]—his peers gladly acquitted him by a vote of 59 to 14.

Mohun's later career, by the way, was of a piece with this history. In 1699 he was for the third time tried for murder, but was unanimously acquitted, though his companion in the affair, Edward Rich, Earl of Warwick, was convicted of manslaughter. For a period he evidently made a supreme effort to mend his ways; then, in 1712, his ungovernable temper once more got the better of him: he forced the Duke of Hamilton, with whom for years he had been at law, into a duel to the finish; and in the early morning of November 15th, in Hyde Park, these two killed each other. [Thackeray used the result of this sensational combat with dramatic effect in "Esmond."]

We do not know what Mrs. Bracegirdle thought of all this storm raised by her Magnetick Charme; certainly, though, it made her more famous than ever.

## Chapter X

# *WHEN BRACEGIRDLE MET OLDFIELD*

THEN arose an extraordinary and dramatic situation, when she followed Betterton to the Haymarket Theatre, to star in the new enterprise which Vanbrugh was starting on an elaborate scale.

A new figure had arisen on the boards, theatening all existing feminine supremacies.

Nance Oldfield was a sempstress, daughter of a soldier, who had attracted the attention of George Farquhar, the young playwright genius, by reciting a passage from a play. She obtained a place in the Drury-lane company—and Cibber remarks that, coming into the House in 1699, "she remain'd about a Twelvemonth almost a Mute and unheeded, 'till Sir John Vanbrugh, who first recommended her, gave her the Part of Alinda in *The Pilgrim*, revis'd." [This was in 1700. She had before that made an attempt as Candiope in *Secret Love*.]

"This gentle Character happily became that want of Confidence which is inseparable from young Beginners, who, without, seldom arrive at any Excellence: Notwithstanding, I own I was then so far deceiv'd in my Opinion of her, that I thought she had little more than her Person that appear'd necessary to the forming a good Actress; for she set out with so extraordinary a Diffidence, that it kept her too despondingly down to a formal, plain [not to say] flat manner of speaking. Nor

could the silver Tone of her Voice 'till after some Time incline my Ear to any Hope in her favour.

"But public Approbation is the warm Weather of a Theatrical Plant, which will soon bring it forward to whatever Perfection Nature has design'd. However, Mrs. Oldfield [perhaps for want of fresh Parts] seem'd to come but slowly forward till the Year 1703.* Our Company that Summer acted at the *Bath* during the Residence of Queen Anne at that Place. At that Time it happened that Mrs. Verbruggen, by reason of her last Sickness [of which she some few months after dy'd] was left in London; and though most of her Parts were, of course, to be dispos'd of, yet so earnest was the Female Scramble for them, that only one of them fell to the Share of Mrs. Oldfield, that of *Leonora* in Sir Courtly Nice, a Character of good, plain Sense, but not over elegantly written.

"It was in this Part Mrs. Oldfield surpris'd me into an Opinion of her having all the innate Powers of a good Actress, though they were yet but in the Bloom of what they promis'd. Before she acted the Part, I had so cold an Expectation from her Abilities, that she could scarce prevail with me to rehearse with her the Scenes she was chiefly concern'd in with Sir *Courtly*, which I then acted. However, we ran them over with a mutual Inadvertency of each other. I seem'd careless, as concluding that any Assistance I would give her would be of little or no Purpose; and she mutter'd out her Words in a sort of mifty [resentful] manner at my low Opinion of her. But when the Play came to be acted, she had a just Occasion to triumph over the Error of my Judgment, by the [almost] Amazement that her unexpect'd Performance awak'd me to; so forward and sudden a Step into Nature I had never seen; and what made her Performance more valuable was, that I knew it all proceeded from her own Understanding, untaught and unassisted by any one more experienc'd Actor."

*Gildon could still declare scornfully in 1702 that she was among the "meer Rubbish that ought to be swept off the Stage with the Filth and Dust."

S. Harding Delin. James Stow Sculp.

Mrs. BRACEGIRDLE.

Published June 1st 1811

Cibber had laid aside, the summer before, the first two acts of his own comedy, *The Careless Husband*, "in Despair of having Justice done to the Character of Lady Betty by any one Woman then among us." Being now convinced he had been entertaining a girl genius unaware, he finished this play and produced it, in 1704, with his find in the leading part, on which the whole effect depended.

It had an enormous popularity, much of which the author handsomely attributed to Mrs. Oldfield's surpassing rendering of the agreeable, gay, outspoken young Lady of Quality.

At one stroke the charming, diffident young actress was installed as the stage idol of the day, whose art and personal refinement made her indisputably first for quarter of a century.

That extraordinary career [she died at 47, in 1730, "leaving all the Court and half the town in tears"] properly belongs to the next century. But it was this new favourite, nearly ten years younger and of the same type, with whom Mrs. Bracegirdle had to reckon when, in 1706/7 the two Houses were joined together [Vanbrugh having had his difficulties] into one company, acting at the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane, under the title of His Majesty's Comedians, and under the general government of Colonel Brett.

Mr. Robert W. Lowe [who edited Cibber's "Apology" in 1889] doubts entirely the picturesque tale of the clash that ensued: with justice he is highly sceptical of the narrator, Edmund Curll, flagellated by Pope in the "Dunciad." Curll was a bookseller—publisher—author—man about town, who made the term "Curlicism" signify a literary indecency; and he was always in some personal newspaper or broadside quarrel, or being prosecuted for libel or for issuing obscenities. Not the best witness, to be sure. But he did know all the gossip, especially of stage matters; and, while the available evidence does not show two successive performances of the play in question, it is difficult to believe that he could have made up such a tale out of whole cloth.

Anyhow, this is the story, in the anonymous "Life of Mrs. Ann Oldfield," ascribed to Curll, published in 1730. [The Life by Egerton in 1741 was also from the same facile pen.]

"Not long after, as Mrs. *Oldfield* daily improved in her Profession, a Dispute was set on Foot [whether first started between themselves or by the Town, I will not pretend to determine] whether she or Mrs. *Bracegirdle*, who was then the most celebrated Actress at that time, could best perform a Part in Comedy. This Contest, however it first began, grew at last so considerable, that 'twas agreed to make the Town the Judges: Accordingly *The Amorous Widow; or, The Wanton Wife*, was pitch'd upon as the Play; and to determine this important Point, 'twas order'd that it should be acted two Nights successively, and that Mrs. *Bracegirdle*, as being the Senior, should have the Preference of the first Night, and play the *Wanton Wife*, which same should the next Night be performed by Mrs. *Oldfield:* Never did that not as yet forgotten Contest between the Signoras *Cuzzini* and *Faustina* keep the *Beau Monde* more in anxious Suspense, or occasion more Effusion among the Toupees, and fluttering of Fans among the Ladies, than this Emulation of our Heroines did in the *Beaux* and *Belles* of those Times: Nor did ever the terrible Atchievements of the invincible Mr. Figg, and the Heroick Mr. Holmes, cause more Wranglings an[d] Animosities between the bold *Britons* and the undaunted *Hibernians* in the Districts of *Oxford-Road*, *Hockley-in-the-Hole*, *Islington-Road*, and the Parts adjacent, than this tremendous Alter[c]ation did between the Orange Wenches and the Eighteen Penny and Twelve Penny Galleries of those Days. But to return to the Matter in Hand;

"The long expected Night being come, the Senior Championess appear'd, attended with a croud of Beaux as might be expected from a long unrivall'd Superiority, and perform'd her Part, as usual, to such Admiration as inspir'd a Confidence into all her Friends, and made Mrs.

*Oldfield's* well Wishers dread the Issue would not be in her favour. However, the next Night, when our Heroine graced the Stage, and had spoke but ten Lines, such was the gracefulness and beauty of her Person, so enchanting the harmony of her Voice and justness of her Delivery, and so inimitable her Action, that she charm'd the whole Audience to that Degree, they almost forgot they had ever seen Mrs. *Bracegirdle*, and universally adjudged her the Preheminence; which so much disgusted her celebrated Antagonist, that in a short time after she quitted the Stage. Ever since that time Mrs. *Oldfield* has maintained an undisputed Sovereignty over all her Contemporaries on every Theatre where-ever she perform'd."

In his later biography [1741], as Egerton, Curll says Mrs. Barry left too: "they entirely quitted the Business, and left Mrs. *Oldfield sole Empress of the Stage*."

Assuming the tale to be based on fact, an impartial observer might note that it is a notorious quality of the male homo, when torn between two charmers, to prefer the one he is seeing at the instant of choice! And as for the retirement, it is more than probable that Master Colley Cibber's displayed preference for the young prodigy he had discovered had much to do with this violent decision. Cibber's influence was waxing all the time—and "The Laureat" declares specifically that it was the Apologist's backing of Mrs. Oldfield for some parts the older star desired which caused the latter's withdrawal.

Certain it is, she left abruptly and permanently. And the stage was the poorer thereby. For, in spite of the triumphs of the newly-risen luminary, there were many who felt of Ann Bracegirdle—"In Comedy she never had, so she has not left, her Equal."

She lived forty years longer, but seems to have appeared only once after this withdrawal—at Betterton's benefit in 1709.

So passed from the boards one of the supreme early feminine figures

of the English stage, a woman who shares with Nance Oldfield a peculiar adoration, the warmth of which comes down through two hundred years—both as artist and embodiment of irresistible feminine charm.

Anthony ["vulgo Tony"] Aston, an actor and dramatist whose long career covered this period, pays his tribute to her in his "Brief Supplement to Colley Cibber, Esq.:"

"Mrs. Bracegirdle, that Diana of the Stage, hath many Places contending for her Birth. The most received Opinion is, that she was the Daughter of a Coachman, Coachmaker, or Letter-out of Coaches in the Town of Northampton. But I am inclinable to my Father's Opinion, [who had a great Value for her reputed Virtue] that she was a distant Relation, and come out of Staffordshire, from about Walsal or Wolverhampton.

"She had many Assailants on her Virtue, as Lord Lovelace, Mr. Congreve* the last of which had her Company most; but she ever resisted his vicious Attacks, and yet was always uneasy at his leaving her; on which Observation he made the following Song:

*'Pious* Calinda *goes to Pray'rs*
*Whenever I ask the Favour;*
*Yet, the tender Fool's in Tears,*
*When she believes I'll leave her.*
*Wou'd I were free from this Restraint,*
*Or else had Pow'r to win her!*
*Wou'd she cou'd make of me a Saint,*
*Or I of her a Sinner.'*

"She was very shy of Lord Lovelace's Company, as being an engaging Man who drest well: and as, every Day, his Servant come to her, to

*It was uniformly asserted that she was either Congreve's wife or his mistress. But the wits and gossipers of that period condemned an actress beforehand.

*The Indian Queen.*

*E Cooper ex:*

Ann Bracegirdle

ask her how she did, she always return'd her Answer, in the most obeisant Words and Behaviour, *That she was indifferent well, she humbly thanked his Lordship.*

"She was of a lovely Height, with dark-brown Hair and Eye-brows, black sparkling Eyes, and a fresh, blushy Complexion; and whenever she exerted herself had an involuntary Blushing in her Breast, Neck and Face, having continually a chearful Aspect, and a fine Set of even, white Teeth; never making an Exit but that she left the Audience in an Imitation of her pleasant Countenance. Genteel Comedy was her chief Essay, and that too when in Men's Cloaths, in which she far surmounted all the Actresses of that and this Age.

"Yet she had a defect scarce perceptible, viz. her Right Shoulder a little protended, which, when in Men's Cloaths, was cover'd by a long or Campaign Peruke. She was finely shap'd, and had very handsome Legs and Feet; and her Gait, or Walk, was free, manlike and modest, when in Breeches.

"Her Virtue had its Reward, both in Applause and in Specie; for it happened that as the Dukes of *Dorset* and *Devonshire*, Lord *Hallifax*, and other Nobles, over a Bottle, were extolling Mrs. *Bracegirdle's* virtuous Behaviour, *Come*, says Lord *Hallifax — You all commend her Virtue &c. but why do we not present this incomparable Woman with Something worthy her Acceptance?* His Lordship deposited 200 Guineas, which the rest made up 800, and sent to her with Enconiums on her Virtue.

"She was, when on the Stage, diurnally Charitable, going often into Clare-Market, and giving Money to the poor unemployed Basket-women, insomuch that she could not pass that Neighborhood without the thankful Acclamation of all Degrees; so that, if any Person had affront'd her, they would have been in danger of being kill'd directly; and yet this good Woman was an Actress.

"She has been off the Stage these 26 Years or more, but was alive

July 20, 1747; for I saw her in the *Strand*, London, then — with the Remains of charming Bracegirdle."

## Chapter XI

# *CONCLUSION*

BUT we have crossed over into the Eighteenth Century, when the stream broadened out so that it has taken many volumes to cover what has been fragmentarily attempted in this small monograph of feminine beginnings on our stage.

Tenacious as was the popular belief that the actress must be a degraded woman, and earnestly as the fine gentlemen labored to justify this assumption, the three main figures of this first half century of the English Actress—Mary Betterton, Ann Bracegirdle, Nance Oldfield; and later, Peg Woffington—were pioneers in more ways than one.

They gradually built up a mass of irrefutable living testimony that a charming player could also be a self-respecting woman. They dispelled the old silly illusion that it was the profession which necessarily made the actress of poor personal repute.

Sensible folk perceived that, as in everything else, it was the women of the stage who made themselves, and the status of their profession. The Countess of Shrewsbury and some of the other free-and-easy Court ladies, of whom Grammont tells so wittily, were, for all their rank and titles, quite on a par with the promiscuous actress who belonged to any nobleman who beckoned.

It was these fine women of character, who belonged to themselves, even if some of them loved outside the law, to whom their successors should feel grateful.

In America there were few of these earliest problems, for the last of this pioneer group, Nance Oldfield, had died two years before what has been accepted as the first regular theatrical performances in the Colonies, in New York, 1732—though Professor Odell, [in the opening volume of his monumental "Annals of the New York Stage"] has unearthed various earlier essays: the trial in 1665 of three young Virginians in Accomac County for "acting a play of ye Bare and ye Cubb;" Judge Samuel Sewall's outraged record of a "Stage-fight" in Boston itself on April 25th, 1687; a "uniquely interesting" petition of Richard Hunter, somewhere from 1699 to 1702, that Governor Nanfan licence him to produce plays in the Province of New York, "your hono[rs] Petitioner having been at great charge and expense in providing persons and necessary's in order to the acting of Plays in this Citty;" and our lively friend Tony Aston's statement, in his *The Fool's Opera; or, The Taste of the Age*, "Written by Mat Medley and perform'd by his Company of Oxford," that in 1702-4 he had "acted, courted, fought" in Charles-Town and New York, and most of the Southern colonies.

By the former date, at least, the actress was long a well-established fact. To be sure, the prejudice died hard among worthy folk, who often accepted as standards Puritan dictates with which they had not complete sympathy. Here, too, it was the character of some fine stage women which eventually gave dignity and position to the craft.

What they had to contend with in this Land of Freedom, however, was almost worse than the open attacks of the avid pack of Old Rowley's courtiers. As witness the elegant propriety of this apology, which the Boston publisher thought necessary for an American edition of "The Life of Oldfield" [in a reprint of the Betterton-Curll "History"] in 1814:

"Note by the Publisher

"In these memoirs, to avoid imputation from the chaste ear of delicacy,

Anne Oldfield
Govern^r 6^th 1721

it is necessary to remark; that in the aera when many of the female class first flourished in the dramatic sphere, the world was not so scrupulously jealous of, nor sought for that refinement of virtue, which will be allowed is a guardian monitor the present time to many ladies on the *American* Stage.

"At the period when most of these memoirs take their date, ladies on the Stage appearing to every advantage, from grace of manner, beauty of person, melody of voice, costume, &c., attracted the attention of the other sex, whose titles, power and wealth were powerful incentives; allurements which too often predominate among all classes, among all ranks, grades, denominations and sex. From these considerations where will be wanting the philanthropic breast, where the charitable commiseration for errors, to which all thus situated, might be exposed, but which all have not wisely surmounted. Still there are examples of virtue set forth in the foregoing history, which will bear competition with instances of female honor [under similar circumstances] equal to that we have read of in any history."

Funny, past all whooping. No doubt about that.

But I swear by Niminy and by Piminy, by those Fine Shades and Delicate Feelings immortalized of George Meredith, and by all the Nine Gods of Anglo-Saxon Humbuggery —"female honor," and the actress with a sense of humor and self-respect, might better have appealed to Charles's lawless mohocks than to that "philanthropic breast."

However, there is no need of becoming aroused over, let us hope, bygone American prudery and hypocrisy: too many an irate or amused Frenchman has already done that for us.

And, anyhow, the Ladies of the Stage proved that they could take care of themselves.

CHAPTER
XII

# *A TABLE OF SEVENTEENTH CENTURY ACTRESSES*

ONE may say then that apparently the only professional connection women had with the regular English stage up to 1656, or 1660, except as door-keepers, wardrobe-women and sempstresses, was the single woman dramatist noted by Fleay in his "Chronicle History." [For a unique summation of our scanty knowledge as to their earlier participation in pageants, vaudeville, dancing, acrobatics and such entertainments, see Professor Graves's paper, already referred to.]

This early lady playwright was a Lady Elizabeth Carew [or Cary] who, around 1613, wrote at least one tragedy, *Mariam, the Fair Queen of Jewry*, which was presumably produced and is among the 556 extant plays Fleay lists out of the 937 traced to the period, 1559-1642.

The roster of those appearing at the Theatre Royal, Lincoln's Inn Fields or Dorset Garden, up to the end of the century, is as follows. [See Montague Summers' edition of "Roscius Anglicanus" for all available facts on many of these ladies.]

[1656]

CATHERINE [Mrs. Edward] COLEMAN—Ianthe in *The Siege of Rhodes* opera [verse recited to music,] at Rutland House. Later a professional singer.

# *A Table of Seventeenth Century Actresses*

[1660]

MARGARET HUGHES—Desdemona, on Dec. 8, accepted as the first appearance of a regular professional actress. Later the mistress of Prince Rupert. Went to Dorset Garden 1676.

*or*

ANN MARSHALL—The other chief actress of Killegrew's company, and possible first Desdemona. Certainly created Fulvia in Joyner's *The Roman Empress* as late as 1670.

[1661-1700]

## THE MOST FAMOUS ACTRESSES

MARY SAUNDERSON—[better known as Mrs. Thomas Betterton]. 1661-94.

NELL GWYN—1665-82.

JANE DAVENPORT—Roxolana, June 1661. Heroine of the Lord Oxford misadventure.

MRS. MARY KNEIP—Pepys' friend. Acting as late as 1678.

MARY DAVIS—Mistress of the King. Left stage about 1668; died 1687.

ELIZABETH BARRY—Perhaps greatest tragic actress of century. 1673-1708.

ANN BRACEGIRDLE—First appearance, aged 6, 1680. Left stage 1706/7.

NANCE OLDFIELD—First appearance 1700. Supreme in comedy till her death, 1730.

## LESSER FIGURES OF THE PERIOD

The entire list of 17th Century actresses includes about a hundred names. Of many we know almost nothing except the name and a casual appearance. They are given here in approximately the order of their appearance:

### THEATRE ROYAL [*Before about* 1690]

MRS. COREY—Pepys' "Doll Common." Famous as a mimic, and for old women's parts. 1663-1692.

REBECCA MARSHALL—Sister of Ann. Various parts, 1667-1670.

MRS. EASTLAND—Minor roles, 1669-74.

ELIZABETH WEAVER—Noted for her extravagance, lawsuits and light behav-

### DUKE'S COMPANY [*Before about* 1690]

MRS. GOSNELL—Succeeded Moll Davis in *Tempest.*

MRS. LONG—Men's parts. 1663-1673. Mistress of Duke of Richmond.

MRS. HOLDEN—Heroine of a famous mispronunciation, in *Romeo and Juliet*, which rocked the theatre and made a smutty story that has lasted over 260 years!

MRS. JENNINGS—Left stage in 1673.

THEATRE ROYAL [*Continued*]

ior. In Dryden's *The Indian Emperour*, 1665.

SUSANNA UPHILL — Minor roles, 1669-77. First mistress then wife of Sir Robert Howard.

MRS. BOUTELL — Famous for her blue eyes and chestnut hair. Created many ingenue roles, 1663-1697, and "supremely innocent and fascinating." Probably wife of a French court musician.

MRS. JAMES — Secondary parts, 1671-6.

MARGARET RUTTER — Many parts, 1666-77.

MRS. VERJUICE

MRS. KNIGHT

MRS. QUIN

BETTY COX — Played romantic heroines. Succeeded Hughes as Desdemona. 1671-6.

MRS. CORBETT — [Till 1681.]

SARAH COOK — 1677-88.

F. DAMPORT [Davenport]

BETTY DAMPORT [Davenport]

ANN REEVE — Very beautiful; satirized by Buckingham. Known as Dryden's mistress. Minor parts 1670-6.

MRS. BRADSHAW

MRS. WILLIAMS

MRS. DIXON

BETTY SLADE

MRS. FARLOWE

MARGARET SAUNDERS

DUKE'S COMPANY [*Continued*]

ANN GIBBS — Married Thomas Shadwell about 1665. In casts often as Mrs. Shadwell. Retired 1685. Living in 1709.

MRS. NORRIS — Impersonated old women and angry dowagers. Wife of actor, and mother of famous "Jubilee Dicky" Norris. 1664-82.

MRS. MILLICENT

MRS. JOHNSON — Considered loveliest actress of her day.

ELINOR LEIGH — Wife of Anthony Leigh, actor. Played over 60 characters between 1668 and 1707.

ELIZABETH CURRER — Beautiful, spirited, popular. 1677-85.

CHARLOTTE BUTLER — A leading actress. Went to the Dublin Stage, 1692.

MARY PORTER — Succeeded Mrs. Barry.

MRS. SLAUGHTER — Later Mrs. Osborne. In first play at new Dorset Garden, 1671.

MRS. KNAPPER — Waiting-women parts, 1676.

MRS. TWIFORD — 1681-6.

LADY SLINGSBY — First Mary Aldridge, then Mrs. Lee. Under last name 1670-80; as Lady Slingsby, 1681-5. An important actress.

MRS. MOUNTFORT — Daughter of Thomas Percival, actor. Susanna Percival till 1686. Her husband killed by Hill in Bracegirdle abduction. Afterwards married Verbruggen. Noted for humor and variety.

MRS. JOYNER

MRS. OSBORN

## *A Table of Seventeenth Century Actresses*

| Theatre Royal [1691-1700] | Duke's Company [1691-1700] |
|---|---|
| MRS. WYATT | MRS. JORDAN |
| MRS. CLOUGH | MRS. LASCELLES |
| MRS. BURROUGHS | MRS. RICHARDSON |
| MRS. KNIGHT | MRS. LAWSON |
| MRS. UPHILL | MRS. ROGERS |
| MRS. SPENCER | RACHEL LEE |
| MRS. GILLOW | MRS. BOWMAN |
| MRS. PETTY | MRS. KENT |
| KATHERINE BAKER | MRS. AYLIFF |
| FRANCES BAKER | MRS. LUCAS |
| MRS. LE GRAND | MRS. POWELL |
| MRS. SEYMOUR | MRS. CROSS |
| MRS. MERCHANT | MRS. FINCH |
| MRS. BATES | MRS. TEMPLE |
| MRS. BAKER | MRS. CIBBER |
| MRS. PRICE | MRS. ALLISON |
| MRS. MOYLE | MRS. WALLIS |
| | MRS. MILLS |
| | MRS. MARTYN |
| | MRS. PERIN |
| | MRS. LACY |
| | MRS. ANDREWS |
| | MRS. PRINCE |
| | MRS. MOORE |
| | MRS. PERYNG |
| | MRS. WILKINS |

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

# *BIBLIOGRAPHY*


ROSCIUS ANGLICANUS — or an historical review of the stage from 1660 to 1706. Facsimile reprint of the very scarce original edition of 1708. With an historical preface by Joseph Knight. Only 125 copies printed, London, 1886.

The most important first-hand account we have of Restoration actors and stage matters, Downes having been prompter at Lincoln's Inn Fields from 1662 to 1706.

*Also:* ROSCIUS ANGLICANUS — Edited by Rev. Montague Summers. London n.d., about 1929. An invaluable edition, with over 200 pages of notes, containing more exact information of the early actresses than can be found anywhere else.

A BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ACCOUNT OF ENGLISH THEATRICAL LITERATURE — from the earliest times to the present day. By Robert W. Lowe. 500 copies printed. London, 1888.

SOME ACCOUNT OF THE ENGLISH STAGE — from the Restoration in 1660 to 1830. [By Rev. John Genest.] In 10 volumes. Bath and London, 1832.

SHAKESPEARE IMPROVED — By Hazelton Spencer. Harvard University Press, 1927.

ANNALS OF THE ENGLISH STAGE — from Thomas Betterton to Edmund Kean. By Dr. Doran, F.S.A. Edited and revised by Robert W. Lowe. In 3 volumes. London, 1888.

AN APOLOGY FOR THE LIFE OF COLLEY CIBBER — Written by himself. New edition with notes and Supplement [by Anthony Aston] by Robert W. Lowe. In 2 volumes. London, 1889.

PEPYS ON THE RESTORATION STAGE — By Helen McAfee. Yale University Press, 1916.

A HISTORY OF RESTORATION DRAMA — By Allardyce Nicoll. Cambridge University Press, 1923.

THE HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH STAGE—from the Restauration to the Present Time. By Mr. Thomas Betterton. [Really written mainly by Edmund Curll.] London, 1741.

# *Bibliography*


FAITHFUL MEMOIRS OF THE LIFE, AMOURS AND PERFORMANCES OF . . . MRS. ANNE OLDFIELD — Interspersed with several other Dramatic Memoirs. By William Egerton, Esq. [Edmund Curll]. London, 1731.

DRAMATIC MISCELLANIES — By Thomas Davies. In 3 volumes. London, 1785.

A COMPARISON BETWEEN THE TWO STAGES — By Charles Gildon. London, 1702.

DRAMATIC TABLE TALK — London, 1830.

THE COMMONWEALTH AND RESTORATION STAGE — By Leslie Hotson. Harvard University Press, 1928.

THE DRAMATIC RECORDS OF SIR HENRY HERBERT — Master of the Revels, 1623-1673. By Joseph Quincy Adams. Yale University Press, 1917.

A COMPLETE HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH STAGE — By Mr. Dibdin. London *n.d.*

A CHRONICLE HISTORY OF THE LONDON STAGE — 1559-1642. By Frederick Gard Fleay. London, 1890.

MAD FOLK OF THE THEATRE — By Otis Skinner. Indianapolis, 1928.

THEATRE OF THE GREEKS — By John Donaldson, D.D. London, 1875.

WHO WAS ROXOLANA? — By W. J. Lawrence. Article in *The Stage*, London, February 14, 1929.

SHAKESPEARE TO SHERIDAN — By Alwin Thaler. Harvard University Press, 1922.

AN HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF THE RISE AND PROGRESS OF THE ENGLISH STAGE — By Edmond Malone. London, 1803. [Also in the Variorum Shakespeare, 1821.]

A SHORT DISCOURSE OF THE ENGLISH STAGE — By Richard Flecknoe. London, 1664.

WOMEN ON THE PRE-RESTORATION STAGE — By Thornton Shirely Graves. Studies in Classical Philology, Chapel Hill, 1925.

ANNALS OF THE NEW YORK STAGE — By George C. D. Odell. Volume I — to 1798. Columbia University Press, 1927.

THERE HAVE BEEN PRINTED BY THE MARCHBANKS PRESS 750 COPIES OF THIS BOOK (OF WHICH 725 ARE FOR SALE) AFTER WHICH THE TYPE HAS BEEN DISTRIBUTED.
EACH COPY IS NUMBERED AND SIGNED

THIS IS NUMBER.....

*THE PLAYERS' SERIES*

## Monographs of the Stage and Its People

1. The First English Actresses
   *by* HENRY WYSHAM LANIER [*published 1930*]

VOLUMES PLANNED

2. Mary Anderson
3. The Barrymores
4. Ada Rehan and the Daly Group
5. The Sotherns
6. Some Theatrical Letters
7. The Fine Art of Make-up
8. Foreign Stars in America